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A
PORTRAITURE
OF
MODERN SCEPTICISM;
OR,

A CAVEAT AGAINST INFIDELITY:

INCLUDING

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF
THE EVIDENCES OF REVEALED TRUTH,
AND A DEFENCE OF THE CANON AND OF INSPIRATION.

INTENDED AS A PRESENT FOR THE YOUNG.

BY JOHN MORISON, D.D.,
AUTHOR OF "AN EXPOSITION OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS," ETC.

"The Bible is indeed amongst books, what the diamond
is among precious stones."—ROBERT BOYLE.

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PREFACE.

As the forms of infidelity are constantly changing, it becomes the duty of all good men to watch its versatile movements, and to endeavour, according to their several abilities, to counteract its subtle and pernicious influence. Standing, as we now do, in the full blaze of secular knowledge, there is the utmost danger, through the depravity of our fallen nature, of our preferring the wisdom of man to the wisdom of God ; and if the advocates of revealed truth do not rush into the field of conflict with the enemies of human happiness, there is reason to fear that scepticism will obtain a partial and momentary triumph :—I say *partial* and *momentary*, for the

truth of Heaven must ultimately prevail, and every power that would silence the voice of "THE LIVING ORACLES" must at last be crushed by the omnipotent energy of the Son of God. I am not afraid for the ark of the Lord; but I regard it as a solemn duty to contribute my aid, however humble, to the defence of revealed truth; and particularly to make my appeal to that portion of my fellow men who, either from mental tendency, or association in life, are peculiarly exposed to the desolating and pernicious onset of sceptical opinions.

I am aware there is nothing novel or peculiar in the treatise which I now place on the altar of the public; but I am fully satisfied that the position I have taken is sure, and that the sternest or the most insidious infidelity has no honest argument to oppose to the conclusions I have ventured, with unhesitating confidence, to draw. I have written with the decision which becomes him who feels he has truth, and the truth of

Heaven, on his side ; and I beseech no man, who deigns to examine what I have said, to indulge a sneer, while conscience tells him that he should offer up a prayer to "the Father of lights" for wisdom to guide his devious course, and, above all, to rectify his wayward and erring heart.

If there be any thing requiring distinct specification in the plan of the following work, it is the order pursued in laying down the series of evidence in support of the claims of Revelation. Whether right or wrong, I have wrought my way from the interior to the outworks ; and have made my first attack on the citadel of the heart, by endeavouring to point out the adaptations of Christianity to the known and admitted condition of human nature. In doing so, I flatter myself that I have pursued a simpler and more natural course than those writers upon the same important subject who have placed an almost exclusive dependence upon external evidence. At the same time, I have not dared to overlook any

part of that proof which shews the Bible to be the word of God.

In the views I have ventured to express, in reference to the momentous subject of Inspiration, I am fully aware that I have exposed myself to the criticisms of some of my friends, eminent for their piety and biblical erudition. But this I cannot help. I have gone where truth led me; and I verily believe, in the fullest sense, that the Scriptures are—*The word of God*. Should any respectable individual, giving his name, do me the honour to controvert my views of *verbal* inspiration, I shall, if spared, endeavour to reply to his animadversions. But I will not allow myself to be dragged into the field of controversy by any one who treats this awful subject with irreverence. May all my readers be taught of God!

PART FIRST.

A PORTRAITURE OF MODERN SCEPTICISM.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

“THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”*—Such is the concluding sentence of a description which strips fallen humanity of all its boasted excellence ; which shews, by a most convincing train of reasoning, that Jews and Gentiles are alike guilty before God ; and which pictures, in vivid colours, the awful depravity into which men sink without the intervention and the vital reception of the Gospel of peace. As the whole race are involved in one common apostacy, there is only one remedy that meets their case, and that remedy is Christianity. Wherever this divine catholicon is embraced, it ultimately

* Romans, iii. 18.

effects the cure of man's moral distempers; it purifies his conscience from guilt, by an application of "the blood of sprinkling;" it purifies his heart by the operation of a living faith; and it purifies his life by the all-subduing influence of motives which animate him with the love of God, and with the quenchless desire of being conformed to his moral image. Wherever Christianity is rejected, man remains the victim of apostasy, the child of wrath, the sport of evil passions, and, in the truest sense, "without God, and without hope in the world."* Whether we survey a state of pure heathenism,† or contemplate a condition of society in which Christianity is rejected as a fable, we behold, in either case, a soil fertile in every species of wickedness that can insult the divine Majesty, or that can degrade and brutalize the human race. Could we conceive of a community wholly made up of men denying Revelation, and wholly imbued

* Eph. ii. 12.

† It may be fairly questioned, from the practices of all pagan countries, whether there be any people in a state of pure heathenism. Tradition seems every where to have spread some faint glimmerings of celestial light.

with the principles and feelings of modern deism, we should have presented before our minds a scene of moral turpitude and guilt, too fearful to admit of minute examination. In such a community, we should see every social tie dissolved, every virtuous obligation trampled upon, and all the savage passions of the human heart brought into resistless and destructive play. In the creed of an infidel there is nothing whatever to deter him from the basest actions, provided he can screen himself from the eye of public justice, and from the scorn and derision of his fellow men. He is a man altogether without principle, who denies the legitimate distinction between virtue and vice, who resolves all human motive into a principle of self-love, and who is an equal foe to the laws of Heaven, and to the wise and benevolent institutions of men. A powerful writer, and an acute observer of mankind, has said, that "modern unbelievers are Deists in theory, Pagans in inclination, and Atheists in practice."* They profess, indeed, to believe in one supreme and uncreated Intelli-

* Rev. Andrew Fuller. See his Works, vol. i. page 174.

gence, infinitely benevolent, and infinitely holy; but they neither cultivate his benevolence, nor imitate his purity; and as it respects prayer, and praise, and the homage of devout worship, they are as scornfully neglectful of them as if there were no God, and are practically in that state of total irreligion, which shews that verily "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Though they talk loudly of one God, and profess to pay him homage in the temple of nature, it is most clear that in escaping from the folly and absurdity of the "gods many and lords many"* of the heathen, they have plunged themselves into a state of reckless scepticism and doubt, which leaves every perfection of the Deity undefined, which utterly extinguishes his moral government, and which renders even the belief of his very existence a powerless and influential admission.

By the aid of Revelation, indeed, they have wrought their way out of the Pantheon; but, standing in the full blaze of celestial discovery, they have set themselves to blaspheme "the

* 1 Cor. viii. 5.

only living and true God.”* Ungrateful return for that light which the God of mercy has shed upon their path, and which was never surely intended to heighten their guilt, or to accelerate their condemnation !

What, then, are we to understand by *modern* infidelity? Not surely that infidelity is a new thing; for since man lost the image of his God, he has, in all the periods of his eventful history, evinced a tendency to discredit his Maker, and even “when he knew him, not to glorify him as God.”† To provide, in some degree, against this tendency, and to preserve the successive revelations of Heaven from being utterly lost, the Most High selected one family as the depositaries of his truth, and as the ministers of his mercy to the rest of mankind.

It would be easy to shew, by an induction of facts, that it was infidelity, in days of old, which paved the way for the abominations of polytheism. Men first discredited and opposed the true oracles of Heaven, and then they set

* Jer. x. 10.

† Rom. i. 21.

themselves to serve God in their own way, and to prescribe a religion and a worship for themselves; and because "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, back-biters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents; without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful; who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."*

It was such infidelity as this, my esteemed reader, which prepared the minds of mankind for all the grossness and all the absurdity of heathenism; it was such infidelity as this which obtained in Philistia, and Egypt, and Canaan; it was such infidelity as this which called forth

* Rom. i. 28—32.

the stupendous energy of Omnipotence, in confounding and terrifying those evil powers who contemned the name of Israel's God, and oppressed the chosen tribes; yea, it was such infidelity as this which prompted all the idolatries of the ancient church, who no sooner forgot the Lord their God, than they set themselves to worship the gods of the nations among whom they sojourned.

Infidelity is no new thing. It is a plant indigenous to the sinful heart of man; it has sprung up in every age; it has more or less prevailed in every nation under the whole face of heaven; it is the palpable exhibition of that secret and deep-rooted unbelief which is unwilling to accredit any communication as divine that does not picture the Most High as a being altogether answering to the sinful imaginings of a depraved and apostate heart.

By *modern* infidelity, then, we are simply to understand those new forms, and that new energy which scepticism has put on, in modern times, and more particularly since the era of the French revolution; by which it has mightily diffused itself among all ranks of society, and ha

produced a class of writers capable of making their appeal to each separate branch of the community. It is *modern*, because those who are yet in middle life can remember the baneful period when it began to exert its giant strength, and when, with a fiend-like daring, it aimed a deadly blow at the thrones of monarchs and at the altars of religion. We can remember all this, and we can trace in the bloody and impure and ruthless steps of infidelity, the hateful character which belongs to it. It is *modern*, for it has decked itself forth in a thousand novel aspects,—at one time assuming the air of reason and philosophy; at another, appealing to the most vulgar prejudices of the human mind;—now weaving itself into the texture of history, and then clothing itself in the maxims of political wisdom;—in some instances, concealing itself beneath the witchery of a well-imagined tale; and, in others, polluting even the very streams of salvation, by infusing a portion of its deadly virulence into the theology of the age.*

* In proof of this, see Professor Milman's History of the Jews, and many other productions savouring of the Neological school.

It is *modern*, for where, at any former period in the history of the world, did a thing so worthless and abominable put on such an imposing air, and give itself forth as an angel of mercy to the afflicted race? Though it has taught men, that “adultery must be practised if we would obtain the advantages of life; that female infidelity, when known, is a small thing; and, when unknown, nothing;” *—that “there is no merit or crime in intention;” †—that “the civil law is the sole foundation of right and wrong, and that religion has no obligation but as enjoined by the magistrate;” ‡—that “all the morality of our actions lies in the judgment we ourselves form of them;” §—“that lewdness,” in certain cases only, “resembles thirst in a dropsy, and inactivity in a lethargy;” ||—that virtue is “only the love of ourselves;” ¶—though these are the scandalous lessons which it has unblushingly taught mankind, yet is it loudly proclaimed as the only system calculated to model and perfect humanity;

* Hume. † Volney's Law of Nature.

‡ Hobbes. § Rousseau.

|| Lord Herbert, the father of English Deists.

¶ Lord Bolingbroke.

as the last and only refuge for the sorrowing, suffering, and unhappy children of men! This it is which is to rescue them from all unworthy prejudices, which is to dissipate the mists of ages, which is to bring back the golden period of wisdom and reason, which is to convert the whole earth into a paradise, and which is to make men happy as angels under its mild and benignant sway!! There is no cant so disgusting as that of infidelity. Though most of its advocates have been libertines, though its footsteps may be traced in the blood which it has spilt, though it has trampled on all the laws of personal property and of individual right, though it pollutes and degrades wherever it touches, yet are its advocates ever and anon boasting of its sublime virtues, and its blessed achievements. One thing we may be quite sure of, that no one will listen to their vain and empty declamations till he has lost a certain portion of self-esteem, and till he wants to find an excuse for his conduct in the laxness and uncertainty of his belief.*

* "The natural bias of the heart is to sin, and consequently to infidelity, the excuse and covering for sin."—See the Rev. Charles Bridge's *Life of Miss M. J. Graham*, p. 22.

Looking at both the literary and vulgar part of modern infidels, we are constrained to say of them, in the words of the great apostle, "There is no fear of God before their eyes."



CHAPTER I.

THE VIEWS WHICH INFIDELS HAVE ENTERTAINED RESPECTING THE MORAL CHARACTER OF GOD.

GOD cannot be duly feared, as the proper object of religious homage, where his moral attributes and perfections are lost sight of. If we disconnect his wisdom and power from his holiness and goodness and justice, it is impossible to conceive of him with reverence, or to think of him with complacency. In the Christian Scriptures, God's natural attributes are invariably represented as the ministers of his benevolence, integrity, and faithfulness. They declare him to be "a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right"* in all his ways. They proclaim him to be "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and in truth; keeping mercy for thousands, for-

* Deut. xxxii. 4.

giving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and yet by no means clearing the guilty."* They describe him as "of purer eyes than to behold evil," and tell us that "he cannot look upon iniquity."† They exhibit him as "righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."‡ They teach us, that he is "not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him."§ Such is the God of Revelation;—a Being infinitely wise and powerful indeed, but one, at the same time, "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, and ever doing wonders;"|| a Being before whom the highest orders of created intelligences prostrate themselves and exclaim, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."¶

How unlike are these descriptions of the eternal and immutable God, to the vague, contradictory, and even wicked representations of infidelity. "We cannot," says Lord Bolingbroke, "ascribe goodness and justice to God, according to our ideas of them, nor argue with any cer-

* Exod. xxxiv. 6.

† Hab. i. 13.

‡ Ps. cxlv. 17.

§ Psalm v. 4.

|| Exod. xv. 11.

¶ Isa. vi. 3.

tainty about them;" and again, "it is absurd to deduce moral obligations from the moral attributes of God; or to pretend to imitate him in those attributes." The language held by Bolingbroke is common to the infidel school. The entire moral character of God is overlooked by them, unless when they talk of his mercy, which they always do in a manner totally inconsistent with the existence of any such thing as a moral government. Mercy displayed at the awful risk of prostrating the claims of immutable holiness, can only be another name for injustice; and can therefore have no affinity to that infinitely benevolent Being who, in all the distributions both of his goodness and mercy, acts in a manner worthy of himself, the source and pattern of all the rectitude and purity which exist throughout the universe.

"The object," says a distinguished author, "of the Christian adoration is Jehovah, the God of Israel; whose character for holiness, justice, and goodness, is displayed in the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, in a more affecting light than by any of the preceding dispensations. But

who or what is the god of deists? It is true they have been shamed out of the polytheism of the heathens. They have reduced their thirty thousand deities into one, but what is his character? What attributes do they ascribe to him? For any thing that appears in their writings, he is as far from the holy, the just, and the good, as those of their heathen predecessors. They enjoy a pleasure, it is allowed, in contemplating the productions of wisdom and power; but as to holiness, it is foreign from their inquiries: a holy God does not appear to be suited to their wishes.”*

After tracing the conflicting views of modern infidels, in reference to the proper standard of morality, the same powerful writer adds,—“It is worthy of notice that, amidst all the discordance of these writers, they agree in excluding the Divine Being from their theory of morals. They think after their manner; but ‘God is not in all their thoughts.’” In comparing the Christian doctrine of morality, the sum of which is *love*, with their atheistical jargon, one seems to hear

* Fuller's Works, vol. i. p. 11.

the voice of the Almighty, saying, 'Who is this that darkeneth counsel with words without knowledge? Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man.' '*

* Fuller's Works, vol. i. p. 27.

CHAPTER II.

THOUGH INFIDELS PROFESS TO HOLD THE DOCTRINE
OF THE DIVINE EXISTENCE, YET THEY REFUSE OR
NEGLECT ALL RELIGIOUS WORSHIP.

IN this feature of their character, they are more inconsistent, and more irreligious too, than even pagan idolators themselves, who evince great zeal and make many sacrifices in the service of their dumb idols. One would imagine, that if there be one great first cause, the Creator and upholder of all things, the benignant source of all the happiness which creatures in any part of the universe enjoy—one would imagine, I say, that if such a Being exist, he is entitled to the devout and spiritual worship of all his intelligent creatures. Such is the dictate even of unassisted reason, as has been demonstrated by a reference to the rudest and most brutalized portions of the human race. How astounding then is the fact,

that only in Christian countries can men be found denying the validity of stated worship to the Deity ; as if the only use to be made of Revelation were to employ it for the horrid purpose of obliterating all our natural feelings of reverence for his awful perfections ! In the inspired volume we learn that "God is a spirit, and that they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* This supposes the duty of worship, and prescribes the qualities by which it is to be distinguished. The language of those who know the divine character, and who possess a right spirit, will ever be, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord ; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker ; for he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."† Men may boast as they

* John iv. 24.

† Psalm xcv.

please of their belief in one God, but if they do him no actual homage, if they have no stated seasons and places of devotion, they are in a far worse condition than were those benighted Athenians, whom Paul beheld prostrate at an altar dedicated to "the unknown God." It is the temper, the disposition of infidelity, no less than its preposterous creed, which distances it from the spirit of true worship. Devotion cannot grow in a soil on which the inexpressible levity of scepticism has cast its withering blight. Religious awe cannot be felt in a mind that has no sensible hold of God's moral perfections. Love to God, drawing the soul forth in repeated and habitual acts of grateful adoration, cannot dwell in a heart where worldly lusts and enmity against the moral government of the Most High are struggling for the mastery.

The very same thing which led men of old to forsake the worship of the only living and true God, and to betake themselves to the abominations of idolatry, is that which banishes

from every circle of infidels everything like the semblance of religious homage to the Deity. Is it demanded what this said thing is? I reply, in the language of the Apostle, "they did not like to retain God in their knowledge."* They lost all delight in his holy character, and hence they sought relief for their guilty feelings in the exercises of a religion which corresponded with the dictates of their own impure hearts.

Deists are placed somewhat peculiarly. As they are found only where Revelation has either completely banished the grossness of idolatry, or where, at least, it has shed its benignant rays, they cannot for shame revel in the impurities of heathenism; but as they take no delight whatever in the character of that one God whom they profess to adore, they live in the habitual and avowed neglect of his worship. The ancestors of paganism forsook his worship, "because they did not like to retain him in their thoughts;" and for the same reason precisely infidelity has no temple, no altar, no sacrifice, no avowed,

* Rom. i. 28.

habitual, and well-defined worship to that glorious Being, from the near contemplation of whose character it shrinks with instinctive dislike and dread.

Could we see infidelity cultivating the spirit of prayer, laying aside its extreme and disgusting levity, and evincing an anxiety to arrive at the true knowledge of God, we should begin to hope on behalf of its unhappy victims; but reckless as its advocates are of all devotion, and leaning as they do to their own understanding, and evincing an utter contempt for every thing sacred, we are compelled to look on them as in a condition peculiarly hopeless, and must say respecting them "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

CHAPTER III.

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE CHARACTER OF THAT
MORALITY WHICH INFIDELITY INCULCATES AND
DISPLAYS.

ALL who read the Bible attentively, whatever they may think of its divine origin, must be struck with the perfection of its moral precepts, and especially with the sublime and cogent reasons which it assigns for the performance of every duty which we owe both to God and man.*

That monster of wickedness, Thomas Paine, whom no man that ever knew could trust, has said respecting the Bible—"I feel for the honour of my Creator in having such a book called after his name." He must surely have meant, that he felt for himself, when he discovered in the Bible, if he ever read it, such an array of holy and benevolent precepts upon which it had been his

* See the second part of this Treatise, chap. i. sect. 3.

habitual practice, during a long life, to trample with proud disdain!

The morality of the Bible is not the morality of mere decorum, the garnishing of the outward man, the "making clean the outside of the cup and platter;" it is the morality of principle,—it is the morality of right dispositions,—it is the morality of love to God and love to man. Infidelity says, "there is no merit or crime in intencion;" but Christianity says, that hatred is murder,* that secret lust is adultery,† and that we must "love the Lord our God with all our heart, and strength, and mind, and our neighbour as ourselves."‡ It prohibits the resentment of injuries, and urges the forgiveness of enemies.§ It tells us, "to weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice."|| It enforces every relative duty by an appeal to motives equally tender and sublime,¶ and it demands a personal sanctity of manners, which admits of no reserve, and leaves room for the

* 1 John, iii. 14, 15.

† Matt. xxii. 37—39.

|| Rom. xii. 15.

† Matt. xxvii. 28.

§ Rom. xii. 19—21.

¶ Eph. v. 25. vi. 1, 5—9.

indulgence of no single habit of transgression.*

If infidelity were from above, it would bear the marks of its celestial origin. God must be holy; and a religion suited to his intelligent creatures ought to carry with it some resemblance to his moral nature. Infidelity has no such resemblance in either theory or practice. In theory it is an apology for almost every crime that disgraces human nature; and in the different codes of its advocates, every species of transgression is either defended or palliated. And what it is in theory, it is yet more abundantly in practice. Its leading characters have been worthless beyond expression. What were Herbert, and Hobbes, and Shaftesbury, and Woolston, and Tindal, and Bolingbroke, but so many notorious hypocrites, who, for a piece of paltry self-interest, professed to love and reverence Christianity, while they were all the while insidiously endeavouring to lower its credit in the world? In the long and gloomy catalogue of

* Heb. xii. 14.

human delinquents, where shall we find two miscreants such as Rochester and Wharton? They were indeed a reproach to our common nature. Morgan's dishonest quotation of Scripture to serve a purpose, and his miserable cant in professing himself to be a Christian, notwithstanding his amazing zeal to subvert all the peculiarities of revealed religion, speak volumes as to his notions of morality. Hume, the most dishonest and prejudiced of all historians,* died as a fool dieth, cracking vulgar jokes with some of his unhappy companions.† Voltaire so little regarded truth, that, in speaking in his "Ignorant

* How can the guardians of the rising generation still leave them to the guidance of such a sycophant in politics, and such a sceptic in religion?

† "Nothing but the most frivolous dissipation of thought can make even the inconsiderate forget the supreme importance of every thing which relates to the expectation of a future existence. Whilst the infidel mocks at the superstitions of the vulgar, insults over their credulous fears, their childish errors, or fantastic rites, it does not occur to him to observe that the most preposterous device by which the weakest devotee ever believed he was securing the happiness of a future life, is more rational than unconcern about it. Upon this subject, nothing is so absurd as indifference; no folly so contemptible as thoughtlessness and levity."—See a work entitled "*The Nature of the Proof of the Christian Religion*," &c., by D. B. Baker, A.M., p. 42.

Philosopher" of the tolerative spirit of the ancient Romans, he observes, "they never persecuted a single philosopher for his opinions from the time of Romulus till the popes got possession of their power." In this passage a veil is drawn over the massacre of thousands and tens of thousands of unoffending Christians. In like manner, this boasted friend of liberty and reason, when he describes the expatriation, or cruel death of one million of French Protestants, speaks of them as "*weak and obstinate men.*" As these Protestants, not being infidels, were stripped of all claim to philosophy, we suppose it was a small matter to murder such vulgar persons in cold blood ! We find this same champion of infidelity requesting his friend D'Alembert to tell for him a direct lie, by denying that he was the author of the "Philosophical Dictionary." His friend told the lie for him ; and he has himself well described his own character in the following words :—" Monsieur Abbé, I must be read, no matter whether I am believed or not." Voltaire, after all his infidelity, being threatened by the authorities, died a Catholic.

Rousseau was profligate and immoral from his youth up. "I have been a rogue," says he, "and am so still sometimes, for trifles which I had rather take than ask for." He abjured Protestantism, and became Catholic; "for which," says he, "in return, I was to receive subsistence; but," he adds, "from this interested conversion, nothing remained but the remembrance of my having been both a dupe and an apostate." After this, settling at Geneva, and finding that there he was denied the rights of Christian citizens, he renounced popery and conformed to the religion of the state. The life of this wretched man was one continued and uninterrupted scene of hypocrisy, fornication, seduction, base intrigue, and, withal, constant violation of the rules of honesty. What he said of one of the events of horror which marked his career may be applied, with too much truth, to his whole history—"Guilty without remorse, I soon became so without measure."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF INFIDELITY.

IT is no wonder surely that such a race of men should have prepared the minds of their disciples for deeds of unusual atrocity. In a neighbouring country, a fit theatre presented itself for the exhibition of infidelity in its own native colours. There gross superstition on the one hand, and arbitrary government on the other, led thousands *virtuously* to sigh for national deliverance. With loud professions of love of liberty and self-devoted patriotism, infidelity rushed into the field of conflict; but though she professed to be an angel of mercy, she soon proved herself to be but a fiend of destruction. There was no deed of horror which she did not perpetrate. Within her death grasp, life and property ceased to have any value attached to them. The most

virtuous citizens fell victims to her insatiable cruelty. Personal aggrandisement became the sole object of her ambition; and, under the fair pretence of philosophy, of enlightened policy, and of regard to the public weal, a whole nation was laid in ruins, every public institution was plundered, the state was sunk in anarchy and confusion, deeds of blood too shocking to describe were perpetrated, and the church herself, already sufficiently degraded, was made the organ of propagating blasphemies the most hideous against the God of heaven. "Infidelity," observes a spirited and able chronicler of these events,* "having got possession of the power of the state, every nerve was exerted to efface from the mind all ideas of religion and morality. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul, or a future state of rewards and punishments, so essential to the preservation of order in society, and to the prevention of crimes, was publicly ridiculed, and the people were taught to believe that death was an everlasting sleep.

* Judge Rush, of the United States.

“ They ordered the words ‘ Temple of Reason ’ to be inscribed on the churches, in contempt of the doctrine of revelation. Atheistical and licentious homilies were published in the churches, instead of the old service ; and a ludicrous imitation of the Greek mythology exhibited under the title of ‘ The Religion of Reason.’ Nay, they went so far as to dress up, with the most fantastic decorations, a common strumpet, whom they blasphemously styled ‘ The Goddess of Reason,’ and who was carried to church on the shoulders of some jacobins selected for the purpose, escorted by the national guards and the constituted authorities. When they got to the church, the strumpet was placed on the altar erected for the purpose, and harangued the people, who, in return, professed the deepest adoration of her, and sung the *Carmagnole* and other songs by way of worshipping her. This horrid scene—almost too horrible to relate—was concluded by burning the prayer-book, confessional, and every thing appropriated to the use of public worship ; numbers, in the mean time, danced round the flames with every appearance

of frantic and infernal mirth." I might also notice the fiend-like malignity which was directed against the institution of the Sabbath, during the reign of terror in France, as if the sole design of that desperate faction was not only to efface all reverence for the Deity from the public mind, but also to destroy every memorial of an intelligent creature's obligation to him, and every symbol of the existence of a moral government.

Let revolutionary and infidel France teach mankind, by one great and affecting lesson, what the enemies of Revelation can do to heighten the standard of national morals, and to render inviolable the persons and properties of men. With the page of their own infamous history before them, let sceptics of every school blush to talk of the benefits which their system is fitted to confer on the human race. And let them remember, that the grand reason why the prevalence of their principles has ever issued in the disruption of every social and moral tie, has been because there was "no fear of God before their eyes."

CHAPTER V.

A CONTRASTED VIEW OF INFIDELITY AND
CHRISTIANITY.*

FROM such scenes as these, how delightful to turn to the pure, and mild, and benignant genius of Christianity! Were her golden rule—"as ye

* The Bishop of Calcutta, in his twenty-second lecture on the "Evidences of Christianity," has finely contrasted the character of Voltaire with that of the Hon. Robert Boyle. "Now contrast," says he, "with this character, any of the eminent Christians that adorned their own country and Europe about the same period. Take the Hon. ROBERT BOYLE, of whom it is difficult to say whether his piety, as a Christian, or his fame, as a philosopher, was most remarkable. Consider the compass of his mind, the solidity of his judgment, the fertility of his pen, the purity of his morals, the amiableness of his temper, his beneficence to the poor and distressed, his uniform friendships, his conscientious aim at truth in all his pursuits and determinations. At an early age he examined the question of the Christian religion to the bottom, on occasion of some distracting doubts which assaulted his mind. Confirmed in the truth of Christianity, his whole life was a comment on his sincerity. He was admitted to certain secret meetings before he had reached mature years—but they were graced and enlightened associations—for can-

would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them"—the universal law of all the families and nations under heaven, how would it change the face of society!—how would it stem the torrent of pride, ambition, and vain glory!—

vassing subjects of natural philosophy, at a time when the civil wars suspended all academical studies, and they led to the formation of one of the noblest establishments of his country.* His disinterestedness and humility were such that he refused the provostship of Eton, and the honours of a peerage, that he might devote his talents and time and noble fortune to works of public utility and benevolence. His uniform regard to truth made him the example and admiration of his age. His tenderness of conscience led him to decline the most honourable office in the scientific world, because he doubted about the oaths prescribed, and his reverence for the glorious Creator induced him to pause whenever he pronounced his name. From such a student we may expect truth. From such a philosopher we receive, with unmixed pleasure, '*A Treatise of the high veneration which men's intellect owes to God*;'† or a discourse '*On greatness of mind promoted by Christianity*.'‡

The same excellent author furnishes the following admirable contrasts:—

" Contrast, in point of mere benevolence, the lives and deportment of such an infidel as Rousseau, and such a Christian as Doddridge; the one all pride, selfishness, fury, caprice, rage, gross sensuality—casting about firebrands and death—professing no rule of morals but his feelings, abusing the finest powers to the dissemination, not merely of

* The Royal Society.

‡ Published in 1685.

† President of the Royal Society.

§ Published in 1690.

how would it cause wars, and rumours of wars, to cease to the very ends of the earth!—how would it unite the whole family of man in one common bond of brotherhood!—how would it banish injustice, cruelty, oppression, and licen-

objections against Christianity, but of the most licentious and profligate principles;—Doddridge all purity, mildness, meekness, and love, ardent in his good will to man, the friend and counsellor of the sorrowful; regular, calm, consistent; dispensing peace and truth by his labours and by his writings; living, not for himself, but for the common good, to which he sacrificed his health and even life.

“Or contrast such a man as Volney with Swartze. They both visit distant lands,—they are active and indefatigable in their pursuits,—they acquire celebrity, and communicate respectively a certain impulse to their widened circles; but the one, jaundiced by infidelity, the sport of passion and caprice, lost to all argument and right feeling, comes home to diffuse the poison of unbelief, to be a misery to himself, the plague and disturber of his country, the dark calumniator of the Christian faith. The other remains far from his native land to preach the peaceful doctrine of the gospel on the shores of India; he becomes the friend and brother of those whom he had never seen, and only heard of as fellow-creatures,—he diffuses blessings for half a century,—he ensures the admiration of the heathen prince near whom he resides,—he becomes the mediator between contending tribes and nations,—he establishes a reputation for purity, integrity, disinterestedness, meekness, which compel all around to respect and love him,—he forms churches,—he instructs children,—he disperses the seeds of charity and truth,—he is the model of all the virtues he enjoins.”

tiousness from the earth! In proportion as Christian principles have triumphed, in that same proportion immorality has disappeared, and all social virtues have been practised; and when it is universal, which we are assured it will be, it will bring moral health along with it to all the dwellers upon earth.

“Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity,” said the immortal Washington, “religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labour to subvert the great pillars of human happiness, those firmest props of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity. Let it be simply asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in the courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.

Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of a peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."*

In a happier age, fast approaching, Christianity will dictate rules of right government; it will establish equitable principles of national commerce; it will teach kings and senates how to rule in wisdom and love; it will remove the great barriers to national tranquillity and national prosperity out of the way, by constituting the "people all righteous," and setting up the authority of God as the best possible support of laws which accord with his word.

Infidelity can dream of no such renovation. Its past steps may be traced in blood and anarchy; and the prospect which stretches before it is scarcely less appalling. It has no link whereby to bind man to man, because it severs man from his Maker. It is essentially heartless and cruel. It rules without God, and would

* Washington's farewell Address to the people of the United States.

exclude him from his own world, and nothing awaits it but the exposure and infamy which must sooner or later overtake all systems of evil.

O, what a world were this if all men were infidels ! Then, indeed, would they soon destroy themselves. Their vices would be such as to annihilate all the social sympathies, and to cause the various elements of society to rush together in wild confusion and ruin.

What cause of congratulation is it, that infidelity, in its more direct forms, has so little power in this country to mould our national institutions ! No one who marks the zeal and malignity of our infidel press, can doubt, for a moment, what would be the fate of every honest and virtuous family, if infidels could, by any means, acquire ascendancy. There is a great deal of secret and avowed infidelity in the land ; but, blessed be God, our property, our domestic peace, our national security are not as yet menaced by the impugners of revelation.

It is at the same time a mournful consideration, that so many of the labouring classes of the

community are vitiated by the wretched dogmas of this school. It is a distinct characteristic of modern infidelity, that it aims to subvert the hopes of the poor. The writings of Mr. Paine, combined with other circumstances, have led to this feature in its malignant history. The libertinism of sceptics, till of late years, was regarded as the exclusive privilege of the educated, the intellectual, and the distinguished portion of mankind. Now it is far otherwise; the pestilence has spread itself, and operatives, in every department of trade, are plied by the apostles of infidelity, who, not content with destroying the poor man's hopes of immortality, set themselves to lower all his notions of moral obligation, to vitiate all his social habits, to foster in him the spirit of rebellion against all constituted authority, and thus, as it were, to deck their victim for the day of sacrifice. I firmly believe that in London alone, to say nothing of other large populations, there are thousands and tens of thousands lost to industry, to health, to reputation, and to peace, outcasts from society, and terrors to the community, who might trace the utter wreck of

their characters to their association with companions of infidel sentiments, and to their familiarity with the infidel press. It has been my lot as a Christian minister, more than once, to confirm these affecting statements by the unequivocal avowals of infidels themselves, in the last periods of human existence, and also by witnessing in some, once promising characters, the baneful effects arising from the adoption of infidel opinions.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AFFECTIONATE APPEAL TO THOSE WHO HAVE
BEEN ENTANGLED IN THE SNARES OF INFIDELITY.

WHEN I reflect how many there are whose faith in Christianity has been shaken, and whose minds have fallen a prey to the wiles of scepticism; and, moreover, when I call to remembrance that so many of the young and promising rank among the victims of this moral contagion, I cannot but feel an earnest desire to become an instrument of good to a portion of my fellow-creatures, at once so interesting and so much exposed. O that God would strengthen me to speak a word to unhappy and deluded sceptics! With all the zeal for their salvation that I can possibly give utterance to, would I make my appeal to their judgments and consciences. Let me bespeak their candour. I am conscious of no motive but a desire to honour God, and to

save their souls. Regarding them as the victims of fatal error, I am devoutly anxious to see them extricated from it. Their creed I hold to be alike gloomy and pernicious, and I would shew them a more excellent way, and would introduce them, with a bounding heart, into the light and liberty of Christianity.

What, then, let me ask, has led you to reject Christianity? Have you carefully examined it, and found its evidence defective? If so, where does the difficulty press? If you are really perplexed, ask counsel of some enlightened Christian, and he will readily aid you in disposing of the doubts and misgivings of a mind really sincere. I believe a doubting man may be sincere. There are many volumes suited to your state, and which you might read with the greatest possible advantage. Let me particularly recommend to your attentive perusal "The Gospel its own Witness," by the late Rev. Andrew Fuller; "The Evidences of Christianity," by Dr. Paley; "A Short Method with Deists," by Leslie; Dr. Chalmers' work on "The Christian Revelation," and a work entitled "A

Treatise on the Nature and Causes of Doubt in Religious Questions."

But let me deal honestly with you, as your friend. *Have* you all this supposed difficulty about the evidence and the truth of Christianity? Or is your hesitancy of a very different order? Do you feel a repugnance to the holy requirements of Christianity, and a consequent dread of the judgments which it threatens? And does this prompt in you the baneful wish, "O that it might not be true?" Remember what Rochester said—"A bad life is the only grand objection to this book;" laying his hand emphatically on the Bible. Has not this been very much the case with you? You have fallen into sinful courses—you have yielded to the ways of the world—you have gone with a multitude to do evil—you have forsaken your better fellowships—you have learnt to spend your Sabbaths in pleasure, and you have gradually become more and more careless. In this state you have been very unhappy at times; you have thought, well, "what if, after all, the Bible be true! What if, after all, the wicked shall be turned into hell!" At this

juncture, some one further advanced in scepticism than yourself has aided you in shaking off the galling yoke of conscience. He has put some infidel publication into your hand; you have read it; it has fallen in with your previous wishes and habits; you have said, "This is the very thing I wanted;" and you have, at last, learned to revile the Bible, to set light by its hopes, and to talk slanderously of its professors.

Come now, my friend, and let us reason together. Look back on the process. Why did you so readily drink in the poison contained in the infidel volume? Why? because you were in a state of mind very much the opposite of that which the Bible demands. But what have you found, my friend, in the regions of scepticism? You have relinquished the hopes of Christianity, by Christ Jesus. What have you obtained in their place? Amidst all your acquirements, have you found peace of mind? Will your present character and your present religion sustain you in a dying hour? Multitudes of infidels have found their creed, at death, insufficient to meet the awful catastrophe. Not a single instance can

be produced, in which a believer in Revelation was terrified or dismayed *because he had been a Christian*. Many have been distressed on account of the defective evidence of their Christianity, but none on account of their being Christians. Does it never occur to you, that if Christianity be true, you are undone?—that if it be false, he who believes it can suffer no injury? * ' Who, let me ask you, are your companions? What are your pursuits? and what your hopes? I deeply feel for you, while I greatly blame you. You may have been inadequately instructed,—you may have seen bad examples,—you may have witnessed great inconsistencies in some of the professors of religion. Granting, however, that all this may have been the case, still the interests of the soul are a *per-*

* "Indisputably," said Lord Byron, in a letter sent by him to the late Mrs. Sheppard, "the firm believers in the Gospel have a great advantage over all others, for this simple reason—that if true, they will have their reward hereafter; and if there be no hereafter, they can be but with the infidel in his eternal sleep, having had the assistance of an exalted hope through life, without subsequent disappointment, since (at the worst, for them) 'out of nothing, nothing can arise,'—not even sorrow."

sonal concern. No man can stand in your place when you die. I beseech you, then, to arouse yourself from that lethargy into which *sin* and *unbelief*, acting and reacting, have conjointly sunk you.

Ask yourself this question, "What makes me a sceptic? Is it because I have examined for myself, and know the Gospel to be a fable? or is it because I desire that it may be one?" And why should you desire this? If Christianity does not meet your case, no other system can. Infidelity has not met your case; it has not awakened hope; it has not allayed despair; it has not ministered peace. No: it has only stupified a conscience which must yet awake; it has only taught you to put the evil day far away; it has only blinded you for a time to the dread prospects of a future and impending eternity.

Why, I ask again, should you wish that Christianity may not be true? Is it because you feel yourself guilty, and shrink from the condemnation which it threatens? Well might you thus shrink if it did not reveal a remedy, as well as disclose a disease and point out its

consequences. You *are* guilty—yea, ten thousand times more guilty than you ever imagined yourself to be; but what I maintain is, that if you turn away the eye of faith from that great sacrifice which Christianity reveals, you must sink for ever beneath the pressure of your guilt, and with this superadded horror, that you perished at the threshold of mercy.

Is it because you do not love the pure and holy demands of Christianity, that you turn away from it? Well; but is not this, its pure character, the proof of its celestial origin? and if so, will it avail you to reject it? Will the holy life it requires be less obligatory because you determine not to pursue it? Will the great Judge excuse you at last because you loved your sins more than his revealed will?

Besides, what is to root out unholy inclinations, to correct depraved habits, to superinduce devotion, and to raise the soul to God? *Is it not divine meditation on the blessed word?* Here is that consecrated fountain which, by the grace of God, shall quench your thirst of sin. Here you may read of “the new heart” till you

know, by experience, what it is. Here is a divine Deliverer, whose "name is called Jesus, because he saves his people from their sins."* Here is a divine Sanctifier, who can "create within you a clean heart, and renew within you a right spirit."†—One word more, and I have done. Ask God to teach you. Ask him, if the Bible be from him, to enable you to come to the belief of it. Ask him to remove your blindness, to allay your prejudices, and, above all, to prevent any sinful habit from giving a bias to your decision. Make no delay in this work. If you die a stranger to the hopes of Christianity, it had been better for you that you had never been born!

* Matt. i. 21.

† Psalm li. 10.

PART SECOND.

THE TRUTH AND EXCELLENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMPARATIVE CREDIT DUE TO THE CONCLUSIONS OF SCEPTICS AND CHRISTIANS.

“ For we have not believed cunningly devised fables.”*

SUCH, at least, is the Christian's estimate of the stability of his own hopes; and such is the settled conviction of every sincere friend of revealed truth. When the moral character and habits of those who profess their belief in Christianity is taken into account, there can be no hesitation in admitting that they are strictly honest in the avowal of their faith, and that they do not affect to repose on the truth of a

* 2 Pet. i. 16.

system which, after all, they secretly disbelieve. That there are many false pretenders to the faith of Christ is readily conceded; but after the names of all such have been struck off from the list of its genuine friends, there will yet remain a multitude of honest men, far above all suspicion, who, in life, and at death, have professed their sincere and heart-felt belief in the religion of Jesus of Nazareth. To impugn their integrity, as men of veracity, would be alike absurd and unjust. They are, beyond doubt, entitled to all credit for sincerity, when, with the Bible in their hands, they exclaim, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables."

The great question then is, are they mistaken in the estimate which they have formed of the Bible? Are they under the influence of a delusion, though they fondly believe that they have embraced the truth of God? In deciding such inquiries as these, several considerations naturally occur to the mind, irrespective even of the *direct* evidences of the Christian Revelation.

What, then, has been the amount of *intellectual*

qualification possessed by Christians for investigating the truth or falsehood of their hopes? It may be true, indeed, that the mass of those who have embraced the gospel have been little elevated, in point of mind, above any other equal portion of the human race; although it cannot be denied, that in Christian countries the common people are much superior to their fellows in heathen lands. But be this as it may, can any one affirm that among the list of Christian advocates there are not to be found multitudes of men in the highest degree qualified to decide upon any question of evidence submitted to their notice? Will it be pretended that imbecility of intellect produced the faith of such men as Sir Isaac Newton, John Locke, Sir Matthew Hale, the Hon. Robert Boyle, Bishop Butler, Dr. Watts, Mr. Wilberforce, Dr. Paley, Dr. Beattie, Dr. Chalmers, and Robert Hall? Such a pretence, on the part of any infidel, would be equally fatal to his sense and candour. In grasp of mind, in depth of erudition, in diversity and extent of science, the pledged advocates of the gospel have had no rivals in the republic of

letters, or in the ranks of scepticism.* All who know any thing of the state of facts, must concede this point, that the sublimest exercise of reason is not incompatible with the most profound defer-

* The following eloquent passage, from a speech of the late Lord Erskine, delivered by him in the Court of King's Bench, on occasion of a prosecution for the publication of Paine's "Age of Reason," may not be unacceptable, as tending to illustrate the position, that superiority of intellect has been enlisted on the side of Christianity :—

"It seems, gentlemen," said his Lordship, "this is an age of *reason*; and the time and the person are at last arrived, that are to dissipate the errors which have overspread the past generation of ignorance. The believers in Christianity are many, but it belongs to the few that are wise to correct their credulity. Belief is an act of reason, and superior reason may, therefore, dictate to the weak.

"In running the mind along the list of sincere and devout Christians, I cannot help lamenting that *Newton* had not lived to this day, to have had his shallowness filled up with the new flood of light.

"But the subject is too awful for irony; I will speak plainly and directly. *Newton* was a Christian!—*Newton*, whose mind burst forth from the fetters cast by Nature upon our finite conceptions. *Newton*! whose science was truth, and the foundation of whose knowledge of it was philosophy; not those visionary and arrogant presumptions which too often usurp its name, but philosophy, resting upon the basis of mathematics, which, like figures, cannot lie. *Newton*, who carried the line and rule to the utmost barriers of the creation, and explored the principles by which, no doubt, all created matter is held together and exists.

"But this extraordinary man, in the mighty reach of

ence to the truth and excellence of Revelation. It is easy for some infidel demagogue to vaunt himself of his great wisdom and learning before an ignorant and vicious assembly; but let the

his mind, overlooked, perhaps, the errors which a minuter investigation of the created things on this earth might have taught him of the essence of his Creator.

“What, then, shall be said of the great Mr. Boyle, who looked into the organic structure of all matter, even to the brute inanimate substances which the foot treads on? Such a man may be supposed to have been *equally* qualified with Mr. Paine to ‘look through Nature, up to Nature’s God.’ Yet, the result of all *his* contemplation was, the most confirmed and devout belief of all which the other held in contempt, as despicable and drivelling superstition.

“But this error might, perhaps, arise from a want of due attention to the foundations of human judgment, and the structure of that understanding which God has given us for the investigation of truth.

“Let that question be answered by Mr. Locke, who was, to the highest pitch of devotion and adoration, a Christian. *Mr. Locke*, whose office was to detect the errors of thinking, by going up to the fountains of thought, and to direct into the proper track of reasoning the devious mind of man, by shewing him its whole process, from the first perceptions of sense to the last conclusions of ratiocination; putting a rein, besides, upon false opinion, by practical rules for the conduct of human judgment.

“But, these men were only deep thinkers, and lived in their closets, unaccustomed to the traffic of the world, and to the laws which practically regulate mankind!

“Gentlemen! in the place where we now sit to administer the justice of this great country, above a century

entire history of the Christian era be appealed to as the proof, that the choicest spirits in each age, since the days of the apostles, have been the professed adherents of the gospel. Chris-

ago, the never-to-be-forgotten *Sir Matthew Hale* presided,—whose faith in Christianity is an exalted commentary upon its truth and reason, and whose life was a glorious example of its fruits in man,—administering human justice, with a wisdom and purity drawn from the pure fountain of the *Christian* dispensation, which has been, and will be in all ages, a subject of the highest reverence and admiration.

“But it is said by the author, that the Christian fable is but the tale of the more ancient superstitions of the world, and may easily be detected by a proper understanding of the mythologies of the heathen.

“Did *Milton* understand those mythologies? was *he* less versed than Mr. Paine in the superstitions of the world? No: they were the subject of his immortal song; and though shut out from all recurrence to them, he poured them forth from the stores of memory, rich with all that man ever knew, and laid them in their order, as the illustration of that exalted faith, the unquestionable source of that fervid genius, which cast a sort of shade upon all the other works of man. The mysterious incarnation of our blessed Saviour (which this work blasphemes in words so wholly unfit for the mouth of a Christian, or for the ear of a court of justice, that I dare not, and will not, give them utterance), *Milton* made the grand conclusion of the “*Paradise Lost*,”—the rest from his finished labours,—and the ultimate hope, expectation, and glory of the world.

‘A virgin is His mother, but His sire
The Power of the Most High; he shall ascend
The throne hereditary, and bound His reign
With earth’s wide bounds, His glory with the heavens.’”

tianity, then, has not been subjected to the humiliation of being only embraced by the weak and ignorant of mankind; it has called forth the plaudits of the greatest men that ever lived, and has done more by its own simple energy to augment the genius and to multiply the acquirements of the race, than all other systems of religion and all other causes combined.*

But I ask again, what have been the *moral* qualifications possessed by Christians to enable them to decide upon the validity of their own hopes? Have they been men, in general, whose perceptions have been blunted and vitiated by an irregular and profligate life? or has not the very reverse of this been the case? If two persons of equal intellect, but of extremely different moral habits,—the one devout, consistent, benevolent; and the other proud, self-important, devoted to pleasure,—should set themselves to

* “If a map,” observes the present Bishop of Chester, “could trace the real influence of the Gospel, it would also delineate the proportion of intelligence and active virtue. The measure of spiritual knowledge is also the measure of barbarism and of civilization, of mental stupidity, or mental illumination.”—*Evidences*, Fourth Edition, 12mo, pp. 427, 428.

ascertain the truth or falsehood of any system assuming to be a revelation from God—which of the two parties might be expected to be the more successful in the investigation, provided that the assumed revelation were genuine? It cannot surely be denied that the advantages in favour of the man of correct moral feeling and habit would be immense. Nor can it be maintained by any one in possession of sound reason, that a wrong state of mind and character will not materially influence the decisions of the understanding, in reference to moral truth. Upon this principle it is that we enter our earnest protest against the flimsy dogma of modern infidelity, that belief is, in all cases, a thing strictly involuntary. On the contrary, we submit, that in no case where belief is claimed on behalf of moral truth, can it be yielded in a state of mind fairly entitled to the appellation involuntary. That can never be involuntary which may either be prompted or retarded by the state of disposition. Nothing is more obvious than that men may blind themselves to the light of truth, and stumble, as in the dark, at noon day. But who

would say that that blindness is involuntary which is the result of a man's loving darkness rather than light because his deeds are evil?

Upon a full and impartial review of the moral character and habits of those who have truly embraced Christianity, we are disposed to abide by the conclusion, that their advantages for reaching truth have been astonishingly great. Compared with the leading advocates of Deism, they stand on a lofty eminence, from which, with a vision unclouded by the mists of prejudice and crime, they can discern the moral beauty and loveliness of that fair land which opens to their view in the territory of revealed truth.*

If, then, the intellectual advantages of the Christian are fully equal to those of the infidel, and if his moral advantages are far superior, to what conclusion must such a fact conduct us? Why, to this, that the Christian is much more likely to be right in *embracing* the gospel, than the sceptic

* "Religion cannot exist," said Sir Walter Scott, "where immorality prevails, any more than a light can burn where the air is corrupted."—*Life of Napoleon*, vol. i. p. 54.

is in *rejecting* it. His judgment is not less to be respected, and his dispositions and habits are more in accordance with the dictates of what even natural conscience and pure deism would pronounce to be right. And do we on this account urge men to receive Christianity? By no means. All we demand is, that they will give it a fair hearing, and that they will look on it with that respect which will dispose them to weigh well its divine evidence, and not rashly to dash from their parched lips the cup of salvation. We ask not that men should believe because others have believed; but that they would honestly inquire whether believers or sceptics are most worthy of imitation? The careful investigation of this question will generate a state of mind favourable to the claims of revelation, and will prompt the reasonable desire that the gospel may be true.

I may here premise, that no man was ever in earnest to find out the truth of Christianity who did not make conscience of imploring God's direction and assistance in an inquiry upon which so much depends. If Christianity be *not* a re-

velation from God, then has none ever been vouchsafed to the children of men; and if none has ever been vouchsafed, then are the whole race sunk in gross darkness as to the character of God, and the destinies of futurity. If christianity *be* a revelation from God, then is it treason against Heaven to reject its evidence, or to set light by the remedy which it prescribes for our fallen and guilty nature. Under these circumstances, how necessary is it to ask of God that he would lead us, his erring children, into all truth, and that he would so far banish every unholy prejudice that our minds may be open to receive whatever bears upon it the stamp of a celestial origin. It is a mournful fact that this spirit of devotion seems an utter stranger to almost all writers of the sceptical class. They boast of their deism, and neglect one of its first and simplest lessons,—viz., the duty of an intelligent, but feeble and dependent creature seeking counsel of the great and merciful Being who formed him.

CHAPTER II.

**SHEWING THAT THE EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY IS
OF SUCH A NATURE THAT IT ADMITS OF BEING
BROUGHT HOME INDIVIDUALLY, WITH CONVINCING
POWER, TO EVERY MAN'S BOSOM.**

It is never to be forgotten that those who are called to examine the divine pretensions of Christianity are the very persons interested in its communications. To man it distinctly makes its appeal, and in him it proposes to effect that mighty renovation of which it speaks. Should it be true, then, to its own assumed character, it will undoubtedly verify its several claims in the personal consciousness of all its recipients. I choose to begin here, because I am satisfied that no man can sit down to investigate the truth of his Bible, who does not stand in need of light on the subjects of which it treats. Every man's conscience may suggest to him that he has

offended against God, that he has violated, in innumerable instances, his own sense of right and wrong, and that there may be some fearful retribution awaiting transgressors in another and unknown state of existence. But whatever Reason may surmise on these subjects, she has no balm with which to soothe an anguished conscience, no system of propitiation by which to relieve a guilty and foreboding mind, no mediator between the offended Majesty of Heaven and his erring creatures. It is Christianity alone which opens up a door of hope to an apostate race; every thing besides is utter conjecture. Infidels may boast of the composure and satisfaction they feel in contemplating the issues of the present life; but their exemption from anxious dread is but one instance out of many in which the voice of conscience is silenced by that spirit of utter and reckless scepticism, which on the one hand rejects a mass of well-authenticated evidence, and on the other professes firm belief and unshaken confidence in its own dogmas, without so much as a tittle of proof to support them.

The man, then, who examines Christianity in a right spirit, may expect to perceive, in its intimate bearing on his own case, that it is of God. If he is in that state of mind which is suitable to a rational creature anxious to know the will of God, he will find in Christianity what he can discover no where else. Is he conscious of sin? it reveals to him its true character, traces it to its source, and points to its consequences. Is he the subject of legitimate dread and apprehension in prospect of standing before an offended God? it tells him how his guilt may be effectually removed, and how the peace of an accusing conscience may be restored. Is he oppressed whenever he thinks of the divine purity, and contrasts it with a nature ever prone to evil? it proposes to subject him to a healing and remedial process, by which moral health is to be restored to his diseased soul, and by which he is to be taught to delight in God, and to aspire after his likeness. Is he mournfully sensible of the fact, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit," and that nothing under the sun can satisfy the desires of a mind panting after immortality? it opens up to his

view sources of never-ending delight, it brings him to the very fountain of all happiness, it shews him how his fondest expectations may be realized, it tells him how to delight in God, and how to draw near in acceptable worship to Him whom angels adore, and before whom the spirits of darkness flee in terror and dismay.

It becomes every man who sets himself to the task of examining Christianity, to fix his attention on the following momentous inquiry:—"Is this professed revelation adapted to my actual necessities? to my fears and hopes? to the circumstances by which I am surrounded? and to the prospects which stretch before me?" If, upon minute inquiry, it is found to be thus adapted to our fallen state, it will surely carry along with it a striking demonstration of its divine origin; and if, upon actual experiment, we find that the reception of Christianity allays our guilty fears, gives peace to our troubled consciences, quenches the thirst of sin, inspires the hope of immortality, supplies motives for patient endurance, and sheds the lustre of moral loveliness and purity over the character in whom it dwells, then may we

assure ourselves of the source whence it sprung, and then may we enter, with a full heart, into the meaning of the beloved disciple when he says, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."*

"I think," said the good and great Richard Baxter, "that in the hearing and reading of the Bible, God's spirit often so concurrereth, as that the will itself should be touched with an internal gust and savour of the goodness contained in the doctrine, and at the same time the understanding with an internal irradiation, which breeds such a certain apprehension of the verity of it, as nature gives men of natural principles. And I am persuaded that this, increased by more experience and love, doth hold most Christians faster to Christ than naked reasonings could do. And were it not for this, unlearned, ignorant persons were still in danger of apostacy by every subtle caviller that assaults them. And I be-

* John v. 10. See also a discourse, by the Author, on "the Experimental Evidence of Christianity," included in a volume lately published by ministers connected with the Monthly Meeting, "On the Evidences of Christianity."

lieve that all true Christians have this kind of internal knowledge from a suitableness of the truth and goodness of the gospel to their now quickened, illuminated, and sanctified souls.”*

Let no one venture to reject Christianity, then, who has never made it the subject of his intense regard, in connexion with the exigencies which press upon his own condition and prospects. It can be but ill understood by the man who has never looked at it in its adaptation to his own case. It is an individual, as well as a general remedy; and the true study of Christianity is the examination of its coincidence with the wants and wishes, the hopes and fears, which press upon every son and daughter of Adam. For the want of this close inspection of the individual aim of Christianity, it is to be feared that thousands either reject it, or are utterly indifferent to it. But how contrary is all this to the spirit of true science, which rejects nothing, and admits nothing but upon actual experiment.

* See Baxter's reply to Lord Herbert, entitled “More Reasons for the Christian Religion,” 12mo. 1672, pp. 135, 136.

Let Christianity be fairly put to the test—let it be taken home with unhesitating confidence to the heart—let its divine remedies be applied to the distempered mind—let its proffered influence be implored—let its true character as a restorative system be fully and impartially tried, and then, should it after all fail to impart peace, to heal the malady of the soul, to answer its own professed designs, let it be held up to that obloquy which it deserves.

But where is the man who ever betook himself to Christianity without finding it to be the refuge of his weary mind? Who could ever, upon actual trial, charge it with a lack of faithfulness to its own pretensions? Who ever embraced its animating hopes without finding them productive of peace, and purity, and joy? Who ever became a true Christian without feeling the self-evidencing power of the gospel? Who ever believed on the Son of God without having proof, in his own mind, that the Bible is true? Who ever made actual trial of Christianity without finding it to be the “wisdom of God, and the power of God,” to the salvation

of his soul? Who ever knew the truth as it is in Jesus without being made free by it from the thralldom of sin and the bondage of corruption? The man who is a genuine believer is as fully conscious as he is of existence, that Christianity is no cunningly devised fable. It has established its throne in the deep-seated convictions of his heart. He has felt the transformation it has wrought: "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."* His entire character has been favourably affected by it. Upon his once gloomy path it has shed the light of immortality,—it has taught him to "rejoice even in tribulation,"†—it has changed all the aspects of life, by throwing over them the hues of eternity,—it has conferred on him a reality of happiness which the whole creation had no power of imparting. In his own person he beholds a monument of the truth and excellence of Christianity, which forbids him for ever to doubt. By other evidences, indeed, his faith is confirmed; but in his peace of mind, in that

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

† Rom. v. 3—5, xii. 12.

“hope which is full of immortality,” and in the heavenward bearing of his once earthly character, he is enabled to feel that Christianity is no “cunningly devised fable.”

Having briefly looked at what may be regarded as the *experimental evidence* which Christianity is capable of planting in every man's bosom, we may now advance to other parts of this momentous subject.

CHAPTER III.

CONTAINING A BRIEF SURVEY OF THOSE BRANCHES
OF EVIDENCE WHICH IT IS PROPER TO URGE UPON
THE ATTENTION OF THOSE WHO HAVE NOT AS YET
YIELDED UP THEIR MINDS TO THE DIVINE AU-
THORITY AND TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE
GOSPEL.

SOME of those evidences may be traced in the internal character of Christianity itself, and others in those outward attestations by which Divine Providence has demonstrated the fact of its celestial origin. As I am fully convinced of the self-verifying power of the religion of Jesus Christ, I think it well to begin with the first of these branches of evidence, that no one may, with truth, imagine that we shrink from a thorough investigation of the internal structure and actual tendencies of our Holy Faith.*

* I do not think, judging from the manner in which infidels themselves have written, that the most successful

SECTION I.

THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

WHEN the subject of internal evidence has at any time deeply engaged my thoughts, I have proposed to myself the following question :—
“ What is the most wonderful, and at the same time the most unaccountable, object which presents itself to our notice in a careful perusal of the New Testament Scriptures ? ” This question has always drawn forth one simple answer—
the character of Jesus of Nazareth. In examining the *internal* evidence of Christianity, look—

method of assailing them is to begin with a discussion of the *external* evidences of the gospel. From their general ignorance of the character of Revelation itself, and from its marked adaptation, when examined, to produce conviction of its divine origin, I rather hesitate as to the propriety of demanding the belief of a sceptic upon the mere presentation of its *external* credentials. Besides, there is scarcely any object to be achieved by this mode of procedure, which is not equally well answered by the method of arguing the truth of scripture from an examination of its own contents. Assuredly the divine authority of the heavenly messengers may be verified as much by what they say, as by any other circumstance whatsoever ; and if the real power of conviction lies in their message, it seems but right to try its efficacy.

1. *At the moral character of its Great Founder.*

Let that character be fairly investigated, and I am greatly mistaken if it will not breed a conviction that Christianity must be from heaven. That such a person lived, and suffered, and died in the land of Judea, is admitted equally by heathen and Jewish writers, and requires no formal proof, therefore, to establish the fact. Josephus, Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger, place beyond all reasonable doubt the fact of his existence, and the period of his life, ministry, and death.

But what an object of astonishment and wonder do we behold in "the man Christ Jesus!" Trace the son of Mary and Joseph from the manger at Bethlehem to the cross on Calvary, and what a combination do you witness of all that is innocent and pure and benevolent! Here is wisdom the most profound in the absence of all the ordinary means of acquiring it. Here is a Being in whom all the social and relative affections are not only seen to advantage, but in absolute perfection. Here are humility and dignity perfectly combined;—the

loftiness of moral excellence, without a single approximation to the feeling of contempt for others. Here is a sanctity of character which never yielded to a single temptation, and never deviated from the path of rectitude in a single instance, combined at the same time with a condescension and mercy which never spurned the miserable, and never frowned on the trembling penitent conscious of his guilt and pleading for forgiveness. Here is one who never resented an injury, and never forgot a kindness,—who never thought of an enemy, but to bless him; or of a faithless friend, but to pity and forgive him. Here is one whose days were devoted to the exercises of active benevolence, and whose nights were spent in communion with his God,—who sought no reward of all his generosity,—who wept tears of anguish over the approaching fate of those who persecuted him at every step of his existence with unabating cruelty, — and who spent his last breath in praying for his guilty and relentless murderers. Whence such a character as this? Was it from earth or heaven? If from earth, then where can we look for its great

archetype? Not, surely, in the Gentile world; for it infinitely surpassed even the *ideal* models which were laid down by the purest and most enlightened of its philosophers. Not in the Jewish world, for even its most cherished patriarchs were chargeable with innumerable imperfections; and in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, the great body of the nation were peculiarly degraded, both as it respected the acquirements of the understanding, and the habits of the life and conduct. Whence, then, this mysterious and wonderful personage—this Being so unlike all the generations of men who had preceded him or who have followed after him, yet clothed in a human form, possessed of human sympathies, and subject to human woes? No wonder that *Rousseau*, in his exquisite and well-known contrast between Socrates and Christ, should feel himself constrained to remark, that “the inventor of such a personage would be a more astonishing character than the hero.”* “Is it possible,” said he, speaking of the Bible and

* Works, vol. v. pp. 215—218.

of the character of Christ, "is it possible that a book, at once so simple and sublime, should be merely the work of man? Is it possible that the sacred personage, whose history it contains, should himself be a mere man? Do we find that he assumed the tone of an enthusiast or ambitious sectary? What sweetness, what purity in his manner! What an affecting gracefulness in his delivery! What sublimity in his maxims! What profound wisdom in his discourses! What presence of mind, what sublimity, what truth in his replies! How great the command over his passions! Where is the man, where is the philosopher, who could so live and so die without weakness and without ostentation? When Plato described his imaginary good man, loaded with all the shame of guilt, yet meriting the highest rewards of virtue, he described exactly the character of Jesus Christ: the resemblance was so striking that all the fathers perceived it." Yet this was the strange and unhappy man who, through the wickedness and pride of his heart, declared, "*I cannot believe the gospel.*"

: Upon no correct or reasonable supposition whatever but that the Lord Jesus was the very person he assumed to be, the person whom the Christian Scriptures describe him to be, viz., the Messiah of the Church, and "God manifest in the flesh," can we account for the solitary and awful grandeur* of a character "holy,

* Bishop Sherlock, in contrasting the character of Jesus Christ with that of Mahomet, has, in one of the most beautiful personifications in our language, finely touched the argument for the truth of Christianity here contended for. "Go," says he, "to your Natural Religion; lay before her Mahomet and his disciples arrayed in armour and in blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands and tens of thousands who fell by his victorious sword; shew her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry him into his retirements. Shew her the prophet's chamber, his concubines and wives; let her see his adultery, and hear him allege revelation and his divine commission to justify his lust and his oppression.

"When she is tired with this prospect, then shew her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men, patiently instructing both the ignorant and perverse; let her see him in his most retired privacy; let her follow him to the mountain, and hear his devotions and supplications to God. Carry her to his table to see his poor fare, and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her see him injured, but not provoked; let her attend him to the tribunals, and consider the patience with which he endured the scoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her to his

harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens,"* "who did no sin,"† and "who knew no sin."‡

The REV. CHARLES BRIDGES, in his excellent Memoir of Miss M. I. Graham, (and which I take the liberty of strongly recommending to the notice of the young,) who had been considerably tainted with infidelity, states that the character of Christ, as a proof of the credibility of the Christian revelation, arrested her peculiar attention. A minute scrutiny of his spotless life was most satisfactory in its result. "The more," said she, "I studied this divine character,—the more I grew up, as it were, into its simplicity and holiness, the more my understanding was enabled to shake off those slavish

cross, and let her view him in the agony of death, and hear his last prayer for his persecutors—'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

"When Natural Religion has viewed both, ask—which is the prophet of God? But her answer we have already had when she saw part of this scene through the eyes of the centurion who attended at the cross; by him she spake and said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.'"—See *Sherlock's Sermons*.

* Heb. vii. 26. † 1 Pet. ii. 22. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 21.

and sinful prejudices which had hindered me from appreciating its excellence. Truly, his words were dearer to me than my necessary food. He was my 'All in All.' I did not want to have any knowledge, goodness, or strength, independently of him. I had rather be 'accepted in the Beloved,' than received (had that been possible) upon the score of my own merits. I had rather walk leaning upon his arm than have a stock of strength given me to perform the journey alone. To learn, as a fool, of Christ,—this was better to me than to have the knowledge of an angel to find out things myself.

"From that moment," she adds, "I ceased to stumble at the doctrines of the cross. The doctrines of Scripture, which had before appeared to me an inexplicable mass of confusion and contradictions, were now written on my understanding with the clearness of a sun-beam. Above all, that once abhorred doctrine of the Divinity of Christ was become exceeding precious to me. The external evidences of Christianity, though I now perceived all their force, were no longer necessary to my conviction.

From that time," she concludes, "I have continued to 'sit at the feet of Jesus, and to hear his word,' taking him for my teacher and guide in things temporal as well as spiritual. He has found in me a disciple so slow of comprehension, so prone to forget his lessons, and to act in opposition to his commands, that were he not infinitely 'meek and lowly of heart,' he would long ago have cast me off in anger, but he still continues to bear with me, and to give me 'line upon line, and precept upon precept;' and I am certain that he 'will never leave me, nor forsake me,' for though I am variable and inconsistent, 'with Him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' " *

Such was the effect produced upon this intelligent lady's mind by an examination of the moral character of the Lord Jesus, and I am satisfied that a similar result will follow in every instance the adoption of the same course. At least we do claim from infidels, if they will still continue to reject the truth, that they furnish us,

* Page 17—19.

upon their own principles, with some reasonable account of the source whence sprung the ineffable purity and benevolence of the Son of God. Till they have accounted for his unequalled character they are chargeable with the utmost levity and irrationality in persisting in their unbelief.*

2. Contemplate, as another internal evidence of the divine origin of Christianity, *the unrivalled sublimity of its diction.*

Compared with the rich treasures of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, all other compositions must retire into the shade. Rousseau must have felt this conviction most powerfully when he made the following reluctant but important concession :—" I will confess," said he, " that the majesty of the Scriptures strikes me with admiration, as the purity of the gospel hath its influence upon my heart. Peruse the works of our philosophers with all their pomp of diction ;

* See a very able Discourse on the Character of Christ, as an evidence of the Christian Religion, by the Rev. W. Walford, in a volume lately published by the Independent ministers of London on the Evidences of Christianity. See also the present Bishop of Calcutta's Seventeenth Lecture on the Evidences, &c.

how mean, how contemptible are they, compared with the Scriptures !”

The opinion of Rousseau is confirmed by that of men vastly his superiors in learning and virtue. Sir William Jones, than whom few of the human race have been distinguished by a more laudable thirst after knowledge, has penned the following striking, but just eulogium, on the style and manner of the sacred writers :—“ The collection of tracts which we call, from their excellence, The Scriptures, contain, independently of a divine origin, more true sublimity, more exquisite beauty, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of poetry and eloquence, than could be collected within the same compass from all other books that were ever composed in any age or in any idiom. The two parts of which the Scriptures consist are connected by a chain of compositions which bear no resemblance in form or style to any that can be produced from the stores of Grecian, Indian, Persian, or even Arabian learning. The antiquity of those compositions no man doubts, and the unstrained application of them to events long subsequent to

their publication, is a solid ground of belief that they are genuine predictions, and consequently inspired."

The celebrated Mr. Addison, in discoursing on the same subject, says, "After perusing the book of Psalms, let a judge of the beauties of poetry read a literal translation of Horace or Pindar, and he will find in these two last such an absurdity and confusion of style, with such a comparative poverty of imagination, as will make him sensible of the vast superiority of Scripture style."

If we examine carefully the pathetic story of Joseph and his brethren; the songs of Moses at the Red Sea, and on the borders of the promised land; the sublime narrative of the giving of the Law from Mount Sinai; the celebrated prophecy of Balaam; the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple; the visions of the Jewish prophets, particularly those of Isaiah; the odes of Jesse's son; the matchless sermon on the Mount; the public appeals of the apostles before heathen tribunals; and the mystic symbols of the Apocalypse, we cannot but be struck and

awed with the unrivalled diction, the surpassing imagery, and the lofty conceptions of the inspired writers. Let all the other books of antiquity be produced; let the classic page disclose its richest stores; let the entire mass of apocryphal writings undergo the strictest scrutiny; let Egypt, and Greece, and Arabia bring forth the proudest monuments of their genius; let the most dazzling passages of the Korán be separated from the mass of its absurdities; let all ages and all nations vie with the writers of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, and it will be seen, by a judge of the most inferior grade, that no argument can be held for a single moment as to the comparative grandeur of the book commonly called the bible, that it throws the whole round of other productions into the shade, and that it is written altogether in a style and manner which admits of no successful rival or counterfeit.

Now, what is the force of this particular argument? Why, the bible was written by the posterity of Abraham—a people proverbial for their destitution of all mental refinement, and who, in their secular history, have displayed a

marked inferiority to all the other nations of antiquity. The conclusion then is, if the wonderful volume known by the name of the bible was verily the production of several Jews, who lived in different ages of the world, they must have written under a direction and an impulse more than human—they must have written under the guidance of that Spirit, to whom they themselves trace their loftiest and humblest inspirations. I feel that this conclusion is sound and rational. Try the bible by any other Jewish production of any age whatsoever, try it by any work that has ever emanated from the pen or the genius of man, and the feeling must resistlessly take possession of the mind, that the words which God speaks, “They are spirit, and they are life.”* Unlike every other document that has been handed down from a remote antiquity, the volume of inspiration carries along with it, in the unutterable dignity and sublimity which pervade all its parts, an evidence of the source whence it sprung,—an evidence which could not

* John vi. 63.

THE
HISTORY
OF
THE
CITY
OF
NEW
YORK
FROM
1609
TO
1898
BY
JOHN
B. HOGAN
AND
JAMES
M. SMITH
NEW
YORK
1898

been written by such persons as the Jewish patriarchs and the Fishermen of Galilee, without any divine afflatus; when such an attempt has been made by them, I am satisfied that, whether they are led to embrace the Holy Scriptures as the word of God or not, they will be compelled to admit the fact that, upon all the canons of literary criticism ever admitted, there is nothing whatever to warrant the idea that the bible has been furnished to mankind in the same way, and on the same principles as other documents of a remote antiquity. When men are brought thus far there is great reason to hope that they will look with some measure of devoutness and integrity at the whole question of Christian evidence.

8. Let the high standard of *the morality of Christianity* be examined with impartiality, and it cannot fail to arouse attention to its extraordinary claims. For though the uncompromising sanctity of revealed truth is among the chief reasons which induce men to cavil at its evidence, and secretly to reject its authority, it is, nevertheless, one of the most powerful

and indubitable proofs of its proceeding from the fountain of infinite purity and benevolence.*

On this subject the celebrated John Locke has said, "The morality of the gospel doth so far excel that of all other books, that to give a man full knowledge of true morality, I would send him to no other book than the New Testament." And, verily, if we examine all the writings of the most enlightened and virtuous of the heathen world, and compare or rather contrast them with the writings of inspiration, we shall be fully satisfied of the accuracy of this great man's opinion. That there are fine passages on certain branches of morals, in some of the writings of pagan philosophers and poets, we do not attempt to deny; but the great question is, what were their writings as a whole, and what were the views of morality generally entertained and acted upon among their disciples? Is it not notorious

* Lord Bolingbroke himself has said, that "The gospel is in all cases one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, of benevolence, and of universal charity." Works, vol. v. p. 138.

that self-murder,* that crimes which admit of no description,† that theft, that sacrilege, that fornication, that adultery,‡ that revenge, that pride, that dissimulation in the worship of the gods,§ that habitual disregard of the duty of prayer,|| and that awful irreverence for the name of the Great Supreme, are taught, with an unblushing effrontery, by some of the chief patrons and guardians of pagan morality? Who does not know that some of the most brilliant passages,

* Seneca thus pleads for self-murder: "If thy mind be melancholy and in misery, thou mayest put a period to this wretched condition; wherever thou lookest, there is an end to it. See that precipice! there thou mayest have liberty. Seest thou that sea, that river, that well? liberty is at the bottom of it; that little tree? freedom hangs upon it. Thy own neck, thy own throat, may be a refuge to thee from such servitude; yea, every vein of thy body." *De ira*, lib. iii. cap. 15. p. m. 319. Plutarch, and Cato, and Brutus, and Cassius, and Cicero, all agree to justify the crime of self-destruction. See Plutarch's *Life of Cato*.

† Juvenal, *Satyr ii.* ver. 10. Diog. Laërtius, vol. i. pp. m. 165, 166.

‡ Millar's *History of the Propagation of Christianity*, vol. i. pp. 63—65.

§ Epictetus bids his disciples "temporise and worship the gods after the fashion of their country." *Enchiridion*, cap. 38. p. m. 56. See A. Fuller's *Works*, vol. i. p. 87.

|| Pythagoras forbids prayer to God, "because," says he, "you know not what is convenient."

both of the Greek and Latin classics, cannot be read by ingenuous youth without involving the risk of a total downfall of their morals?*. We shall find no counterpart, indeed, to the writings of heathen antiquity, unless we turn to the licentious and utterly reckless productions of modern infidelity, in which every thing like disguise is laid aside, and men are taught to do, without restraint, whatever their own vile inclinations may dictate.

How unlike the imperfect and often polluted writings of men is the system of morality laid down and detailed in the several books of the Old and New Testament! Let any man devote a reasonable period to the examination of the spirit and moral precepts of Christianity, and he will be compelled to admit its unsullied purity, its coincidence with all our natural notions of right and wrong, and its indubitable tendency to improve human intercourse, and to constitute mankind a community of brothers. Did all men

* Is it not a heavy disgrace that in Christian countries so much of the time of youth should be spent poring over the vitiated pages of the ancient classics.

believe and obey the dictates of Revelation, what a mighty and favourable revolution would be wrought in the entire frame-work of society ! What habit of known evil does it not proscribe ? What irregular passion does it not forbid ? What acknowledged virtue does it not enforce ? What kindly or generous affection does it not inculcate ? How lofty is its standard of action ! Though self-interest is not and cannot be excluded from a system so adapted to the nature of man, yet it is only permitted to occupy a subordinate place in the morality of the gospel. There men are urged to endure and act “as seeing Him who is invisible ;” * there we are commanded to do no act of beneficence to be seen of men ; † there the honour of God and the good of others are the objects at which they are called habitually to aim ; ‡ there the surface morality of the world is treated with scorn, and a right state of the thoughts and affections is imperatively demanded ; § there meekness, and humility, and condescension,

* Heb. xi. 27.

† Matt. vi. 1—4.

‡ Matt. xxii. 35—40. Luke x. 27.

§ Matt. xv. 19. xxiii. 25—27.

are represented as the true path to greatness;* there haughtiness and pride are associated with all that is mean and worthless;† there an assuming and lofty air is forbidden even in the ordinary intercourses of social life;‡ there covetousness is branded as idolatry,§ hatred as murder,|| and hidden lust as adultery;¶ there every species of resentment is absolutely prohibited;** there the refusal to forgive an injury is described as an effectual barrier in the way of the exercise of divine mercy;†† there all detraction, all backbiting, all evil speaking, all envy, all malice, all circumvention, are shewn to be inconsistent with the hope of eternal life, and the state of acceptance through a Redeemer.‡‡

There is indeed one grand peculiarity belonging to the morality of Christianity, which distinguishes it from that of every other system, viz.—the *sublime and all-subduing character of its*

* Matt. xxiii. 6.

† Mark xii. 38—40. Luke xx. 46.

‡ Luke xiv. 7—11. § Col. iii. 5.

|| Matt. v. 21—26. 1 John iii. 15.

¶ Matt. xxiii. 28.

** Matt. v. 38—42. Rom. xii. 17—21.

†† Matt. vi. 14, 15.

‡‡ 1 Pet. ii. 1—3.

motives. Many useful virtues were enjoined by the Gentile philosophers, but they had no paramount considerations by which to ensure obedience to their own precepts; they had no moral engine of sufficient power to urge a sinful race onward in the path of obedience. Hence their code of morals was almost a dead letter, little regarded by themselves, and totally overlooked by the mass. But who can glance for a moment at the morality of the Bible without coming into contact with those mighty and heart-stirring considerations which are fitted to rouse all the sensibilities of human nature, and to subdue into willing and grateful obedience the most stubborn and rebellious of the race? Let the following examples of the class of motives referred to suffice:—“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”* “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, ten-

* 1 John iv. 10.

der-hearted, forgiving one another, *even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*"* "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."† "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."‡ "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another."§ "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."|| "Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are his."¶ "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto them-

* Eph. iv. 31.

† 2 Cor. vi. 17.

‡ John iii. 16.

§ 1 John iv. 11.

|| Philip. ii. 3.

¶ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

selves, but unto him that died for them and that rose again.*

How mean and poverty-stricken are the motives of all other systems when compared with the religion of Christ Jesus! A book which founds its code of morals upon such considerations can never surely be the production of man. In the wide range of his efforts there is nothing analagous. The fair inference, therefore, is, that a greater than man speaks to us in the living oracles.

It may be safely affirmed, that if Christianity were cordially embraced as the religion of mankind, it would renovate the entire fabric of society. It is impossible for any one to say advisedly, or with truth, that one immoral habit, or one irregular thought or desire, receives a sanction from the writings of Christ and his apostles. The Christian may often have reason, through the infirmity and corruption of his fallen nature, to blush on account of the very imperfect manner in which he acts out his great principles;

* 2 Cor. v. 14.

he may often have occasion to mourn that in him the religion of Jesus has such an unworthy representative ; but he can at all times refer with exultation and triumph to the glorious charter of his hopes ; and while he sees that " the wickedness of man upon earth is great," he may unhesitatingly assure himself that the total neglect or but partial reception of Christianity is the sole cause of the crime and wretchedness which abound. The enemies of revelation themselves being judges, what can they predicate of its probable tendency on the race but unmixed good ? Must they not own that all the moral evil which abounds in the earth is in direct violation of the doctrines and precepts of revealed truth ? Must they not, however reluctantly, concede, that the principles of deism are feeble and powerless as a system of moral renovation, compared with the high and holy dictates of the Gospel ? Who does not perceive that if a time should ever arrive when all men shall give heed to the words of Christ, that that will be the precise period of the world's deliverance from the cruel vassalage of sin ? " Men would then," to use

the words of an eminent divine, “ universally do justice, speak truth, shew mercy, exercise mutual forgiveness, follow after peace, bridle their appetites and passions, and lead sober, righteous, and godly lives. Murders, wars, bitter contentions, cruel oppressions, and unrestrained licentiousness, would no more desolate the world, and fill it with misery ; but righteousness, goodness, and truth would bless the earth with a felicity exceeding all our present conceptions. This is, no doubt, the direct tendency of the scriptural doctrines, precepts, motives, and promises : nothing is wanting to remedy the state of the world, and to fit men for the worship and felicity of heaven, but that they should believe and obey the Bible. And if many enormous crimes have been committed under the colour of zeal for Christianity, this only proves the depravity of man’s heart ; for the Scripture, soberly understood, most expressly forbids such practices ; and men do not act thus because they duly regard the Bible, but because they will not believe and obey it.”*

* See Scott’s Essays, vol. ii. of his works, p. 21.

Now the argument for the divine origin of Christianity arising from its transcendent morality, may be viewed in various lights. In the first place, how comes it to pass, that of all the religions which have sought to obtain the suffrages of mankind, that of Jesus of Nazareth is incomparably the most pure and benevolent in its tendency? How comes it to pass, moreover, that among a rude people, such as were the Jews, there should have arisen a system of faith and worship, which, for grandeur of conception and sanctity of character, outstrips all the other records of time? Is there not in this very circumstance a presumption of the highest order in favour of the divine origin of Christianity?

But supposing, in the second place, that the apostles of our Lord were chargeable with the crime of dexterously imposing a false religion upon mankind, how happens it that they set themselves with such zeal and ardour to oppose the prejudices and preconceived notions of their countrymen? How happens it that they took the very method the least likely to conciliate their good opinion, and to secure their hearty ap-

proval? How happens it that in their system of morality they not only struck a death blow at the pride and hypocrisy of their own nation, but insisted on a purity of heart and life which they knew must expose them to the hatred and derision of all mankind? Upon a mere *human* calculation they adopted a method which could only issue in a perfect failure. Had they flattered the depravity of man; had they introduced a scheme which winked at any of his corruptions; had they imitated the subsequent conduct of the False Prophet; had they promised to their disciples a life of ease and sensual indulgence; had they exhibited in their own history an exemption from poverty, reproof, persecution, and death; in a word, had there been any one thing in the scheme of doctrine they taught to secure the esteem and to call forth the approbation of a corrupt and vitiated state of society, we might then have been left to suspect that they had artfully constructed a system to suit the depraved taste of mankind, and to raise themselves to notoriety by pandering to the vices of human nature. But when the very reverse of this is the

case ; when the morality of the Gospel is so lofty and unbending as to surrender none of its claims to meet the prejudices either of Jews or Gentiles ; when it is so pre-eminent as to stand forth, in solitary grandeur, amidst the religions of all ages and all nations ; when it is found to embody every quality which is fitted to diffuse peace, and justice, and benevolence among man-kind ; when it is impossible to detect in it a single precept which would not elevate the character of man and augment all his personal and relative enjoyments, what ought any thoughtful or considerate mind to conclude respecting it, but that it is the offspring of the Fountain of all Purity, and that it has been vouchsafed by Him in mercy to heal the distempers and redress the miseries of our fallen race ?

I conclude this chapter in the words of one who cannot be suspected of any undue partiality to the Christian faith, of one who, unhappily for himself, did not allow the convictions of his judgment to rule his decisions or to form his character :—

“ The Gospel, that divine book, the only one

necessary to a Christian, and the most useful of all to the man who may not be one, only requires reflection upon it, to impress the mind with love for its author, and resolution to fulfil his precepts. Virtue never spoke in gentler terms; the profoundest wisdom was never uttered with greater energy, or more simplicity. It is impossible to rise from the reading of it without a feeling of moral improvement. Look at the books of the philosophers, with all their pomp; how little they are compared with this! Shall we say that the history of the Gospel is a pure fiction? This is not the style of fiction; and the history of Socrates, which nobody doubts, rests upon less evidence than that of Jesus Christ. After all, this is but shifting the difficulty; not answering it. The supposition, that several persons had united to fabricate this book, is more inconceivable than that one person should have supplied the subject of it. The spirit which it breathes, the morality which it inculcates, could never have been the invention of Jewish authors; and the gospel possesses characters of truth so striking, so perfectly

inimitable, that the inventor would be a more astonishing object than the hero.”*

Let attention be devoted—

4. *To the coincidence of Christianity with the character of God, and the actual condition of man.*”†

* J. J. Rousseau, vol. xxxvi. of his works, p. 36, Ed. Paris, 1788—1793.

“L'évangile, ce divin livre, le seul nécessaire à un chrétien, et le plus utile de tous à quiconque ne le serait pas, n'a besoin que d'être médité pour porter dans l'âme l'amour de son auteur, et la volonté d'accomplir ses préceptes. Jamais la vertu n'a parlé un si doux langage ; jamais la plus profonde sagesse ne s'est exprimée avec tant d'énergie et de simplicité. On n'en quitte point la lecture sans se sentir meilleur qu'auparavant. Voyez les livres des philosophes avec toute leur pompe : qu'ils sont petits auprès de celui-là ! Dirons nous que l'histoire de l'évangile est inventée à plaisir ? Ce n'est pas ainsi qu'on invente ; et les faits de Socrate, dont personne ne doute, sont moins attestés que ceux de Jesus Christ. Au fond, c'est reculer la difficulté sans la détruire. Il seroit plus inconcevable que plusieurs hommes d'accord eussent fabriqué ce livre, qu'il ne l'est qu'un seul en ait fourni le sujet. Jamais les auteurs Juifs n'eussent trouvé ni ce ton ni cette morale ; et l'évangile a des caractères de vérité si frappans, si parfaitement inimitables, que l'inventeur en seroit plus étonnant que le héros.”—See Dr. J. P. Smith's admirable answer to a printed paper entitled “*Manifesto of the Christian Evidence Society.*”

† The Author is greatly indebted, in this part of his essay, to a work entitled “*Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion.*” By Thomas Erskine, Esq., Advocate.

There is a marked tendency in the human mind to trace results to some adequate cause. Hence our dissatisfaction in the mere perception of facts which, in our present state of knowledge, we cannot account for ; and hence also the restless effort made by us to discover some principle of causation sufficient to produce the phenomena beheld. The revolutions of the heavenly bodies must impress every one endowed with reason that there is some mighty impulse to which they are all obedient ; and the feeling we have of the existence of such an impulse has roused that inquiry into the laws of the material universe which has led to all the discoveries of modern science, and which has enabled us to trace, in the one pervading law of gravitation, the reason of certain revolutions and appearances, which without such an application of the human faculties must have been hid in perpetual obscurity.

Nor is the tendency in man to reason from effects to causes the only one discoverable in the examination of what may be called his mental instincts. It is obvious that he is equally prone

to reason from causes to effects; so that when he has satisfied himself as to the existence of a particular cause, and has acquired some knowledge of the mode in which it operates, he is prepared to concede that other effects may be attributed to it besides those which he has already discovered, provided they are in no way inconsistent with the facts and relations now perceived.

Now, the tendencies thus described will be found equally to manifest themselves in reference to mental and moral science, as in reference to the phenomena of the material universe. It is to these laws of our nature that we are indebted for many of those inductions by which we are enabled to judge of the characters and actions of men, and to predicate what may or may not be reasonable to anticipate in certain given circumstances.

Apply these general principles to the investigation of the subject in hand. The Bible is a book professing to come from heaven. Is it, then, a communication possessing anything in common with our ordinary associations? or is it

a book so entirely new as to furnish us with no means of judging of it by the exercise of that ordinary tendency of our nature which leads us to judge of causes by their effects, and of effects by their causes? The slightest examination of the Christian scheme will convince any impartial mind that the view of the divine character and government which it presents is in strictest harmony with what may be deduced from the survey of nature, the phenomena of divine providence, and the dictates of natural conscience. The particular modifications of divine perfection which are seen displayed in the pages of revelation may be to a great extent new, but the great question is,—Are not these modifications such as to fall in and harmonize with all that the reason of man would suggest to him, as suited to the character of God and the condition of human nature? I am satisfied that the discoveries of the Bible, though so transcendently glorious, are, in their great outline, answerable to all our natural conceptions of the Most High, as the supreme moral governor.

Two things seem necessary to authenticate

a religion as coming from God,—*first*, that the facts and representations which it contains should be such as to exhibit all that is lofty in wisdom, mighty in power, awful in purity, and subduing in kindness; and, *second*, that the representation thus afforded of the divine character should, when contemplated and believed by man, be fitted, by the laws of his being, to transform him into the divine image, and to make him a partaker of the divine happiness. The very first shewing of Christianity is to this effect. It proposes, by an overwhelming manifestation of the character of God in the great scheme of redemption, to raise man from his present state of sin and rebellion, and to confer on him that elevated species of blessedness which arises from conformity to the will of an infinitely perfect Being.

“When,” says an eloquent writer, “we read a history which authoritatively claims to be an exhibition of the character of God in his dealings with men,—if we find in it that which fills and overflows our most dilated conceptions of moral worth and loveliness in the Supreme

Being, and at the same time feel that it is triumphant in every appeal that it makes to our consciences in its statements of the obliquity and corruption of our own hearts,—and if our reason farther discovers a system of powerful moral stimulants, embodied in the facts of this history, which necessarily tend to produce in the mind a resemblance to that high character which is there portrayed,—if we discern that the spirit of this history gives peace to the conscience by the very exhibition which quickens its sensibility—that it dispels the terrors of guilt by the very fact which associates sin with the full loathing of the heart—that it combines in one wondrous and consistent whole our most fearful forebodings, and our most splendid anticipations for futurity—that it inspires a pure and elevated and joyful hope for eternity by those very declarations which attach a deeper and more interesting obligation to the discharge of the minutest part of human duty,—if we see that the object of all its tendencies is the perfection of moral happiness, and that these tendencies are naturally

connected with the belief of its narration,—if we see all this in the gospel, we may then say that our own eyes have seen its truth, and that we need no other testimony. We may then well believe that God has been pleased, in pity to our wretchedness, and in condescension to our feebleness, to clothe the eternal laws which regulate his spiritual government in such form as may be palpable to our conceptions, and adapted to the urgency of our necessities.”*

Such an interposition has the Eternal Majesty of heaven vouchsafed in the revelation of mercy by Christ Jesus,—a revelation which abounds in all that is awful and all that is tender ; which describes God as the avenger of sin, and the Saviour of the guilty ; which exhibits the loftiest claims of the lawgiver, and the tenderest attributes of compassion ; which makes moral impurity infinitely odious and detestable, by the very means whereby it is forgiven ; which points to a guilty race reclaimed and saved, while the

* Erskine on Internal Evidence, *third edit.*, pp. 18, 19.

Glorious Projector of the scheme stands forth before the intelligent universe in the ineffable majesty of spotless and unchangeable purity.

Does reason tell us, that as God has seen fit to create various orders of intelligent creatures, to him they must all be accountable, and over them all he must exercise the right and the control of a moral governor? Revelation comes in with its direct and absolute assurance upon this point, resolving all the doubts which sin had fostered in the human mind, and proclaiming God's right to rule, his title to obedience, and his determination to punish every infringement of his righteous government. Had the Bible said less on this head, or spoken a language quite different, it would have been at variance with the simplest dictates of sound reason. If there be one God, the creator and upholder of the universe, the fountain of all being, and of all happiness, it follows by resistless consequence, that he is the governor of the world he has made, and that the laws by which he governs must be in accordance with the dictates of his own pure and benevolent nature. The Scriptures teach us

distinctly what those principles are; but in doing so, they do not violate one of all our natural conclusions.

Does the reason of man whisper to him, that the Being who made him is the constant inspector of his actions, and that a period may arrive when an account will be required of the manner in which he has passed the few short years of his transitory existence? Revelation does not proffer its aid to repress this natural and almost universal feeling; but to place it upon the sure basis of a divine communication, to impart to it the character of an incontrovertible truth, and to raise it to the potency of an all-pervading and all-subduing motive.

Does a secret monitor disturb man's inward repose, and tell him that he has sinned against his own acknowledged standard of duty, and fill him with awful forebodings of judgment to come, and urge him to many a vain expedient for the settlement of that score of guilt which he knows he has been contracting from the earliest dawnings of reason? Revelation does not lift up its voice to repress the natural testimony of con-

science, but to cause it to be heard in yet louder strains of condemnation,—to strip man of all vain conceit of excellence which, in his fallen state, he does not possess,—to shew, by the pure standard of the written law, how far he has departed from his original integrity,—to present such an image of his moral defection as shall cause him to loathe and abhor himself in dust and in ashes before God,—and to teach him the utter insufficiency of all human aid to extricate him from that state of condemnation and sin into which, by rebellion against the righteous Law-giver of the universe, he has sunk.

Does the mind of man, conscious of its own evil desert, and no less conscious of the blight which sin has spread over all the sources of human enjoyment, sigh after some hidden well-spring of life,—some new manifestation of the character of God, which shall dart a ray of mercy and hope across the gloom of his apostacy,—some divine balm that shall heal those wounds which have been inflicted in his lacerated spirit? Yes, my beloved reader, such have been, and such are the wishes and aspirations of the guilty

spirit of man. He has departed from "the fountain of living waters," and the entire range of creature enjoyment has proved but a broken cistern to him. He is not, indeed, rightly affected with the true nature of his malady, nor does he properly appreciate the means by which his peace and happiness may be restored; but he is in that precise state in which, if he will open the revelation of God, and prayerfully examine its contents, he will find the very blessings after which he sighs, and in the application of them will perceive that the Author of his being is also the God of his salvation.

In the promise of a Saviour, divinely accomplished in the fulness of time, and in the propitiatory sacrifice of the cross, we behold a scheme which bears along with it indubitable proofs of its conformity to the character of God, and of its adaptation to the guilt and necessity of man. It is so far, indeed, above all his natural conceptions of a divine interposition, that it may well be styled "the wisdom of God in a mystery;"* but it is at the same time so

* 1 Cor. ii. 7.

exquisitely adjusted to his moral relations, and to the moral catastrophe in which he is involved, that he has only to open his eyes that he may see, and his heart that he may feel. The problem of his salvation is here solved, while the claims of the moral governor remain unimpaired. His conscience tells him that he is a transgressor ; but it suggests no effectual method of escape from merited condemnation. But Christianity points him to "the blood of the Lamb," to the "one offering" of Jesus Christ, "for the sins of the people." He feels that he is at a fearful moral distance from God ; but he sees in the method of his reconciliation the means whereby his nature may be reclaimed, and learns that a heart all rebellion may be drawn by the mighty attractions of divine love into the habit of cheerful, unreserved, and filial obedience.

To doubt that such a scheme,—so perfect in its conformity to all that we connect with the infinitely pure Spirit, and so admirably adapted to the nature, condition, and prospects of man,—to doubt that such a scheme is from heaven,

is to do violence to the surest inductions of enlightened reason, to turn a deaf ear to the voice of conscience, and obstinately to lose sight of a coincidence which distinctly shews that the nature of man and the means of his redemption lay claim to a common origin.

Without the provisions of the Bible, man is a wanderer and an outcast. He beholds, in some measure, his responsibility and his guilt; but he has no well defined prospect of how it may fare with him when his body goes down to the dust. He feels that this world is a wilderness, and all its inhabitants mourners; but he is unable to solace himself in the prospect of a blessed immortality. He finds himself the subject of indefinite forebodings, and discovers nothing in the wide range of created nature that can fill up the desires of a mind distanced from its native element; but how to impart a fixed character to his hopes, and how to satisfy his enlarged desires, he knows not. Let him turn, then, to the well-springs of salvation, let him view the character of God as set forth in the doctrine of the gospel, let him examine for himself the great mystery of

godliness, let him yield up his whole soul to the impression of redeeming love, let him implore the spirit of Christ to unfold the infinite grace and loveliness of his character, let him bow down his reason to the verities of the cross,—then will his guilt subside, his fears vanish, his prospects brighten; then will his soul glow with ardent love to God; then will the darkness which broods over the scenes of earth be scattered; then will the truth of revelation be felt; then will the self-evidencing power of the gospel be verified; and then will the proud objector be converted into a “little child,” and the vain disputer into a meek and humble disciple of the Son of God.

SECTION II.

THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

By the external evidences of Christianity we are to understand those attestations to its divine origin which have been either directly vouchsafed from heaven, or which may be infallibly traced in its early success and in its great moral

results. And if, by an impartial survey of the various topics connected with *internal* evidence, we are compelled to admit the presumptuous boldness of those who can disburden their minds of all apprehension in rejecting a scheme distinguished alike by its grandeur and adaptation,—by a careful examination of *external* evidence, we are driven to the conclusion, that the rejector of Revelation is at war with omnipotence, and that he is standing out against a species of proof which demands of every intelligent and accountable creature the most prompt and unhesitating submission. Such is the nature and such the variety of external evidence, that it leaves every man inexcusable who remains in secret or avowed opposition to the claims of the gospel. In treating of the subject of external evidence I begin—

1. *With Miracles.*

If the Bible be from God, it must be true in itself, irrespective of all miraculous attestation; and if it be not from God, it is equally clear that no miracle can have been vouchsafed on its behalf. A MIRACLE IS AN ACT OF OMNIPOTENCE,

WHICH DEVIATES FROM, OR SUSPENDS THE ORDINARY COURSE OF NATURE,* and which is fitted to produce an impression upon rational beings by the very circumstance of its singularity and its unaccountableness. Such an interposition we may assure ourselves would not be granted in support of any messenger not from God, or of any doctrine containing in it the slightest shade of imposture.

The most inveterate enemies of Revelation have been compelled to admit that a miracle wrought by any being professing to act under

* Dr. Samuel Clarke has said that "A miracle is a work effected in a manner unusual, or different from the common and regular method of providence, by the interposition of God himself, or of some intelligent agent superior to man, for the proof or evidence of some particular doctrine, or in attestation of the authority of some particular person." The Rev. Richard Watson, in his Theological Dictionary, observes, that "A miracle, in the popular sense, is a prodigy or an extraordinary event which surprises us by its novelty. In a more accurate and philosophic sense, a miracle is an effect which does not follow from any of the regular laws of nature, or which is inconsistent with some known law of it, or contrary to the settled constitution and course of things. Accordingly, all miracles presuppose an established system of nature, within the limits of which they operate, and with the order of which they disagree."

the authority of God, would be a sufficient evidence of the divinity of his mission. "We know," said a Jewish ruler to Christ, "that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."* A principle is here admitted which it is impossible, consistently with sound reason, to deny; it is this—that a teacher working miracles furnishes indubitable evidence that his mission is from God. To test, with utmost severity, the evidence of miraculous interposition in any given instance, must be an imperative duty, but to withhold our assent to any doctrine after the finger of Omnipotence has inscribed over it its celestial origin, is to trample reason in the dust, and to set up in its place the most inveterate and stupid prejudice.

The question, then, is, did Christ and his apostles perform the miracles attributed to them in the books of the New Testament? and did they appeal to those miracles in confirmation of the message they delivered? In reading the

* John iii. 2.

inimitable discourses of Christ, no one can hesitate for a moment as to the nature of the appeal made by Him to miracles. "The works," said He, "which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."* "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me."† "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him."‡ "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very work's sake."§ Here miracles are assumed, upon the ordinary principles of reason, to be a sufficient evidence of Christ's mission from the Father to every impartial and unbiassed mind. So unhesitatingly did Jesus of Nazareth use this argument, that when the disciples of John came to him to inquire whether he was indeed the Christ, his only reply was, "Go and shew John again those things which ye do

* John v. 36.

† John x. 25.

‡ John x. 37, 38.

§ John xiv. 11.

hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”* And when the apostles of our Lord allude, at any time, to the power by which they perform their several miracles, they invariably refer to the all-potent charm of “that name which is above every name;” as when the helpless paralytic was healed at the beautiful gate of the Temple—“If we, this day,” said Peter, “be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.”†

* The last clause of this appeal is founded on the argument for Christianity which is derived from prophecy, and which will be glanced at in a subsequent part of this treatise. It was a distinct part of Messiah's prophetic character that when he appeared he should “preach glad tidings to the meek”—that is, to the poor.—Isaiah, lxi. 1.

† Acts, iv. 9, 10.

The whole question of miracles, then, must resolve itself into a matter of fact. And the attempt of Hume and others to blink the fact, by assuming the insufficiency of any testimony to transmit the knowledge of a miraculous occurrence, is neither more nor less than to affirm, that if God should at any time see fit to perform a miracle, in attestation of some message of mercy to a ruined race, he could not adopt any method by which the certain evidence of its occurrence could be preserved from age to age.* It is not, surely, the spirit of sound philosophy in which any man asserts that a miracle is *contrary* to experience. It may not, indeed, come under the head of the ordinary experience of mankind; but that it is contrary to it cannot be shewn. According to our ordinary experience, bodily disease, when successfully removed, is subdued by the influence of certain human remedies which God is pleased to bless. According to the wonderful history of the gospel, disease is often rebuked by a word, a look, an exercise of the secret will of the miraculous

* See "A Dissertation on Miracles," &c., by Georr Campbell, D.D.

agent. But what is there, we ask, in these two distinct classes of facts opposed to each other? They may each, indeed, belong to a distinct chain of causation,—they may be totally independent events,—they may admit and require various kinds of proof; but he who says that they are contrary the one to the other, utters a sentiment opposed to true philosophy, and commits his good sense in his zeal to overturn the evidence of the gospel. “To pronounce a miracle to be false,” says a distinguished writer, “because it is different from experience, is only to conclude against its general existence from the very circumstance which constitutes its particular nature; for if it were not different from experience, where would be its singularity? Or what particular proof could be drawn from it if it happened according to the ordinary train of human events, or was included in the operation of the general laws of nature? We grant that it does differ from experience; but we do not presume to make our experience the standard of the divine conduct.”*

* See the Rev. Richard Watson's Theological Dictionary, under the article “Miracles.”

We hear much among infidel writers of the immutability of the laws of nature; but whence do they learn that these laws are never to be infringed on by the omnipotent will of the Infinite Mind? It is surely no proof that the Almighty is a changeable being, because he either creates a world, or acts according to his own infinite perfections in governing it. There is often a great deal of assumption in the use of the terms "laws of nature," "course of nature," &c., as employed by writers of a sceptical turn. If in the use of such terms it were only intended to assert, that the Most High has subjected the material universe to the government of certain great laws, which act uniformly, except when he is pleased to suspend or to counteract them, there could be no objection whatever to the phraseology employed; but when they are spoken of as a kind of intelligent and independent power,—when they are described as something almost distinct from the continued exercise of the divine behest,—when they are regarded as an imperative control, binding even the will of Deity itself, they are placed in an

imposing light, to which they have no conceivable title. "Our knowledge of the ordinary course of things, though limited, is yet real; and therefore it is essential to a miracle, both that it differs from that course, and be accompanied with peculiar and unequivocal signs of such difference. We have been told, that the course of nature is fixed and unalterable; and therefore it is not consistent with the immutability of God to perform miracles. But, surely, they who reason in this manner beg the point in question. We have no right to assume that the deity has ordained such general laws as will exclude his interposition; and we cannot suppose that he would forbear to interfere where any important end could be answered. This interposition, though it controls, in particular cases, the energy, does not diminish the utility of those laws. It leaves them to fulfil their own proper purposes, and effects only a distinct purpose, for which they were not calculated. If the course of nature implies the laws of matter and motion, into which the most opposite phenomena may be resolved, it is certain that we do not yet know

them in their full extent; and, therefore, that events which are related by judicious and disinterested persons, and at the same time imply no gross contradiction, are possible in themselves, and capable of a certain degree of proof. If the course of nature implies the whole order of events which God has ordained for the government of the world, it includes both his ordinary and extraordinary dispensations, and among them miracles may have their place as a part of the universal plan. It is, indeed, consistent with sound philosophy, and not inconsistent with pure religion, to acknowledge that they might be disposed by the Supreme Being at the same time with the more ordinary effects of his power; that their causes and occasions might be arranged with the same regularity; and that in reference chiefly to their concomitant circumstances of persons and time, to the specific ends for which they were employed, and to our idea of the immediate necessity there is for a divine agent, miracles would differ from common events, in which the hand of God acts as efficaciously, though, less visibly. On this

consideration of the subject, miracles, instead of contradicting nature, might form a part of it. But what our limited reason and scanty experience may comprehend, should never be represented as a full and exact view of the possible or actual varieties which exist in the works of God."*

It is daring and presumptuous in the extreme to attempt, by reasonings *à priori*, to set aside the physical possibility of a miracle, or to assume that human testimony is inadequate to the task of rendering it available to the conviction of mankind. If the argument *à priori* is at all to be admitted in a question of mere fact, where the senses were originally appealed to, it were easy to shew that the miraculous attestations of the gospel are entitled to all the benefits which it can possibly yield. No one can prove that it is contrary to the determined arrangements of Divine Providence that miracles should be wrought; no one can assert, in the spirit of true science, that it may not have

* See the Rev. Richard Watson's Theological Dictionary, under the article "Miracles."

been a part of the great scheme of God's moral government thus to step aside from the rule of his ordinary procedure; no one can advisedly say that if an occasion worthy of miraculous interposition should present itself to the divine omniscience, God would fail to grant such interposition; no one can seriously contemplate the professed objects of Christianity, or examine in detail its wondrous provisions, without being constrained to admit, that it furnishes an occasion worthy of some unusual effort of omnipotence; and no one can calmly survey the miraculous facts recorded in the gospel history without feeling that they are admirably adapted to attest as divine the several communications to which they belong. *A priori*, I should say, that nothing is more reasonable than to suppose, *first*, that God would furnish his erring and sorrowful children with a revelation of his merciful designs; and, *second*, that he would so attest that revelation with the finger of omnipotence as to leave all without excuse who did not embrace its inestimable provisions. If any one is bold enough to affirm that testimony

is an insufficient medium for the conveyance of a miraculous history, he should be prepared to go the whole length of his extravagant assumption, and to maintain, that no revelation could at any time be imparted by God to his creatures, because human testimony, the only method of transmitting historic facts, was insufficient to the task of conveying to the next and to succeeding generations the evidence of such revelation having been imparted. There is no end to vague conjecture if it is allowed to usurp the province of sound reason; and to dictate, before hand, what may and what may not be proper in the Almighty to do. There is no sure way of knowing what God may do, but by ascertaining what he has done; and this can only be known through the medium of that testimony, the accuracy of which admits of being tested by rules which cannot deceive.

I would state the argument, then, on behalf of the miracles of the New Testament in some such way as the following :—The gospel history informs us that both Christ and his apostles wrought miracles; it shews us that those miracles

were appealed to as evidences of their divine mission; and it presents every direct and collateral mark of authenticity and truth which can possibly belong to any document of antiquity. It is admitted, on all hands, that Jesus of Nazareth actually lived and died in Judea,—that his followers became zealous and successful in the propagation of his cause after his death,—and that they were surrounded by many inveterate enemies, both among their own countrymen and the gentiles. In the midst of danger, and in opposition to all their own worldly interests, they persevered even unto death. The cause they espoused was at all times open to the gaze of subtle and fierce enemies, who would have been more than happy to detect any imposture, and who would have been eagle-eyed to discover any pretension to the exercise of the mighty power of God which was not actually possessed. The persecutors of Jesus of Nazareth had their attention drawn to his miracles, which could no longer be hid in a corner; and, unable to account for them, and anxious to prevent their mighty effect, they attributed them to satanic power.

The cause, however, spread with amazing rapidity, and the death of the Master but added fresh energy to the cause of his disciples. For a time, indeed, through the weakness of their faith, they were filled with gloomy forebodings; but, according to his own prediction, their divine Leader rose from the dead; with powers of tongues and gifts of healing they went forth in his name; his resurrection they openly proclaimed in the city of Jerusalem; thousands of impenitent Jews laid down the weapons of their hostility; the miracles of Christ and his apostles were acknowledged by multitudes as indubitable matters of fact; and their fame spread throughout the whole world. Had they been mere impostures, they would have been speedily detected; on the contrary, however, they drew down the peculiar notice of heathen writers, and Celsus himself finds no better method of disposing of them than by absurdly attributing them to a skilful use of the arts of magic on the part of Christ's disciples.*

* Justin Martyr, Apol. I., chap. xxxviii., assures us that the early apologists for Christianity insisted more on

The following things are clear respecting Christ's miracles:—*They were of such a nature as to surpass all efforts of human power or skill.* By them, and without the intervention of second causes, the blind received their sight,* the paralytic instantly walked,† the lepers were cleansed.‡ By them five loaves and two small fishes were multiplied so as to become food for thousands;§ by them simple water was converted into wine;|| by them the stormy tempest was hushed into an immediate calm;¶ by them the spirits of darkness were compelled to depart from those unhappy victims whom they had been suffered to possess;** and by them, once and again, the dead were restored to life, and became the resistless witnesses of a supernatural interposition.†† Now, in all these cases, every

the argument from prophecy than from miracles, because, when they appealed to miracles, the enemies of the truth retorted upon them, by attributing the entire miraculous phenomena of the gospel to the power of magic. The apologists were wrong, but the fact speaks volumes as to the reality of the miracles recorded by the Evangelists.

* Mark x. 46—52.

† Mark ii. 10, 11.

‡ Luke xvii. 12—19.

§ Matt. xiv. 17—21.

|| John ii. 1—11.

¶ Matt. viii. 23—27.

** Luke iv. 41.

†† John xi. 1—48. Luke vii. 11—18.

human being was an equally sufficient judge ; from the very nature of the facts it was impossible that any one could be deceived ; the finger of God was so distinctly palpable, that both sense and reason combined to verify the true nature of the events.

Again, *the miracles of Christ were done in public*, at the doors of the Jewish temple, in the places of public resort, when he had been preaching to thousands, and when thousands were the actual subjects of them.

They were, moreover, of such a nature that no collusion, no magical art, no legerdemain, no kind of deception, could have been practised.

They were wrought in the presence of persons full of enmity and cruel hatred, who would not have failed to lay open the entire imposture, had any existed ; but so confounded were the Scribes and Pharisees at the sight of them, that they sought relief from their unhappy impressions, by representing Jesus of Nazareth as in league with the great spirit of darkness.

The accounts of these miracles were, soon after their occurrence, published to the world, in the very places where they happened ; yet

no evidence can be adduced to shew that a single contemporary of the Saviour was found bold enough to deny the fact of their occurrence ; nor indeed can it be shewn that any attempt of this kind was made* till long after Christ had ascended to heaven. " Here, it may be demanded, When could the belief of such transactions have been obtruded on mankind, if they had never happened ? Surely not in the age when they were said to have been witnessed by tens of thousands, who were publicly challenged to deny them if they could ! Not in any subsequent age ; for the origin of Christianity was ascribed to them, and millions must have been persuaded that they had always believed those things of which they had never till that time so much as heard."†

Having offered the preceding remarks on the

* The fable that the disciples stole the body of Jesus will be dealt with in its own proper place. It is evident, however, that no use was made of it by the Jews where it could have been most available : in fact, it was too absurd to be gravely referred to.

† See the Rev. Thomas Scott's Works, vol. ii. p. 16.

miracles of Christ, I would just observe, that the miracles recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures belong to the same great system of truth, and are supported by similar evidence. Infidels have spoken of the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations as if altogether distinct from the religion of Christ; but this is a gross mistake, as Christianity is the consummation of all those institutions which are embodied in the Jewish Scriptures. The miraculous fact of a universal deluge is abundantly confirmed by all the researches of geologists, and the organic remains of a former world must leave those inexcusable who reject the data of revelation. And with regard to the miraculous history of the Israelites in Egypt, at the Red Sea, in the Wilderness, and in Canaan, the facts of that history and the national monuments which, from the earliest ages, were fixed on to perpetuate it, combine to relieve the mind from the slightest suspicion as to its genuineness. "Can any man of common sense think that Moses and Aaron could possibly have persuaded the whole nation of Israel that they had witnessed all the plagues

of Egypt, passed through the Red Sea with the waters piled on each side of them, gathered the manna every morning, and seen all the wonders recorded in their history, had no such events taken place? If, then, that generation could not be imposed on, when could the belief of these extraordinary transactions be palmed upon the nation? Surely it would have been impossible in the next age to persuade them that their fathers had seen and experienced such wonderful things when they had never before heard a single word about them in all their lives, and when an appeal must have been made to them, that these were things well known among them! What credit could have been obtained to such a forgery at any subsequent period? It would have been absolutely necessary, in making the attempt, to persuade the people that such traditions had always been current among them; that the memory of them had for ages been perpetuated by days and ordinances, observed by all the nation; and that their whole civil and religious establishment had thence originated: and could this possibly

have been effected if they all knew that no such memorials and traditions had ever been heard of among them ?”*

I cannot deny myself the pleasure of furnishing my readers with a remarkably clear and beautiful account of the miracles of the Mosaic dispensation furnished by the ingenious author of “Theological Institutes,” who has already been referred to.*

“Out,” says he, “of the numerous miracles wrought by the agency of Moses, we select, in addition to those mentioned in chap. ix., the *plague of DARKNESS*. Two circumstances are to be noted in the relation given of the event. (Exod. x.) It continued three days, and it afflicted the Egyptians only, for “*all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.*” The fact here mentioned was of the most public kind; and had it not taken place, every Egyptian and every Israelite could have contradicted the account. The phenomenon was not pro-

* See the Rev. Thomas Scott's Works, vol ii. pp. 12, 13.

* Theological Institutes, vol. i. pp. 157—161.

duced by any eclipse of the sun, for no eclipse of that luminary can endure so long. Some of the Roman writers mention a darkness by day so great that persons were unable to know each other ; but we have no historical account of any other darkness so long continued as this, and so intense that the Egyptians “*rose not up from their places for three days.*” But if any such circumstance had occurred, and a natural cause could have been assigned for it, yet even then the miraculous character of this event would remain unshaken ; for to what but to a supernatural cause could the distinction made between the Israelites and the Egyptians be attributed, when they inhabited a portion of the same country, and when their neighbourhoods were immediately adjoining ? Here then are the characters of a miracle. The established course of natural causes and effects is interrupted by an operation upon that mighty element, the atmosphere. That it was not a chance irregularity in nature, is made apparent from the effect following the volition of a man acting in the name of the Lord of Nature, and from its

being restrained by that to a certain part of the same country,—‘*Moses stretched out his hand,*’ and the darkness prevailed, every where but in the dwellings of his own people. The *fact* has been established by former arguments; and the fact being allowed, *the miracle* follows of necessity.

“The destruction of the FIRST-BORN of the Egyptians may be next considered. Here, too, are several circumstances to be carefully noted. This judgment was threatened in the presence of Pharaoh, *before* any of the other plagues were brought upon him and his people. The Israelites also were forewarned of it. They were directed to slay a lamb, sprinkle the blood upon their door-posts, and prepare for their departure that same night. The stroke was inflicted upon the first-born of the Egyptians only, and not upon any other part of the family,—it occurred in the same house,—the first-born of the Israelites escaped without exception,—and the festival of ‘the passover’ was from that night instituted in remembrance of the event. Such a festival could not in the nature of the thing be established in any subsequent age, in

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commemoration of an event which never occurred; and if instituted at the time, the event must have taken place, for by no means could this large body of men have been persuaded that their first-born had been saved, and those of the Egyptians destroyed, if the facts had not been before their eyes. The history, therefore, being established, the *miracle* follows; for the order of nature is sufficiently known to warrant the conclusion, that, if a pestilence were to be assumed as the agent of this calamity, an epidemic disease, however rapid and destructive, comes not upon the threat of a mortal, and makes no such selection as the first-born of every family.

“The miracle of dividing the waters of the Red Sea has already been mentioned, but merits more particular consideration. In this event we observe, as in others, circumstances which exclude all possibility of mistake or collusion. The subject of the miracle; the witness of it the host of Israel, who passed through on foot, and the Egyptian nation, who lost their king and his whole army. The miraculous

characters of the event are :—the waters are divided and stand up on each side; the instrument is a strong east wind, which begins its operation upon the water, at the stretching-out of the hand of Moses, and ceases at the same signal, and that at the precise moment when the return of the waters would be most fatal to the Egyptian pursuing army.

“It has, indeed, been asked whether there were not some ledges of rocks where the water was shallow, so that an army, at particular times, might pass over; and whether the *Etesian* winds, which blow strongly all summer from the north-west, might not blow so violently against the sea as to keep it back ‘on a heap.’ But if there were any force in these questions, it is plain that such suppositions would leave the destruction of the Egyptians unaccounted for. To shew that there is no weight in them at all, let the place where the passage of the Red Sea was effected be first noted. Some fix it near *Suez*, at the head of the gulf; but if there was satisfactory evidence of this, it ought also to be taken into the account that formerly the gulf

extended at least twenty-five miles north of *Suez*, the place where it terminates at present.* But the names of places, as well as tradition, fix the passage about ten hours' journey lower down, at *Chyama*, or the valley of *Beda*. The name given by Moses to the place where the Israelites encamped before the sea was divided was *Piha-hiroth*, which signifies 'the mouth of the ridge,' or of that chain of mountains which line the western coast of the Red Sea; and as there is but one mouth of that chain through which an immense multitude of men, women, and children, could possibly pass when flying from their enemies, there can be no doubt whatever respecting the situation of *Piha-hiroth*; and the modern names of conspicuous places in its neighbourhood prove that those by whom such names were given believed that this was the place at which the Israelites passed the sea in safety, and where Pharaoh was drowned. Thus we have close by *Piha-hiroth*, on the western side of the gulf, a mountain called *Attaka*, which signifies deliverance. On the eastern coast op-

* Lord Valentin's *Travels*, vol. iii. p. 344.

posite is a head-land called *Ras Musa*, or 'the Cape of Moses;' somewhat lower, *Hammam Faraun*, 'Pharaoh's Springs;' whilst at these places, the general name of the gulf itself is *Bahr-al-Kolsun*, 'the Bay of Submersion,' in which there is a whirlpool called *Birket Faraun*, 'the Pool of Pharaoh.' This, then, was the passage of the Israelites; and the depth of the sea here is stated by Bruce, who may be consulted as to these localities, at about fourteen fathoms, and the breadth at between three and four leagues. But there is no 'ledge of rocks;' and, as to the '*Etesian* wind,' the same traveller observes, 'If the *Etesian*, blowing from the north-west in summer, could keep the sea as a wall, on the right, of fifty feet high, still the difficulty would remain of building the wall to the left, or to the north. If the *Etesian* winds had done this once, they must have repeated it many a time before or since, from the same causes.' The wind which actually did blow, according to history, either as an instrument of dividing the waters, or, which is more probable, as the instrument of drying the ground, after the

waters were divided by the immediate energy of the Divine power, was not a north wind, but an 'east wind;' and, as Dr. Hales observes, 'seems to be introduced by way of anticipation, to exclude the *natural* agency which might be afterwards resorted to for solving the miracle; for it is remarkable that the *monsoon* in the Red Sea blows the summer-half of the year from the north, and the winter-half from the south, neither of which could produce the miracle in question.'

"The miraculous character of this event is, therefore, most strongly marked. An expanse of water, and that water a sea, of from nine to twelve miles broad, known to be exceedingly subject to agitations, is divided, and a wall of water is formed on each hand, affording a passage on dry land for the Israelites. The phenomenon occurs, too, just as the Egyptian host are on the point of overtaking the fugitives, and ceases at the moment when the latter reach the opposite shore in safety, and when their enemies are in the midst of the passage, in the only position in which the closing of the wall of

waters on each side could insure the entire destruction of so large a force !

“ The falling of the MANNA in the wilderness for forty years, is another unquestionable miracle, and one in which there could be neither mistake on the part of those who were sustained by it, nor fraud on the part of Moses. That this event was not produced by the ordinary course of nature, is rendered certain by the fact, that the same wilderness has been travelled by individuals, and by large bodies of men, from the earliest ages to the present, but no such supply of food was ever met with, except on this occasion ; and its miraculous character is further marked by the following circumstances :—1. That it fell but six days in the week. 2. That it fell in such prodigious quantities as sustained three millions of souls. 3. That there fell a double quantity every Friday, to serve the Israelites for the next day, which was their Sabbath. 4. That what was gathered on the first five days of the week stank and bred worms if kept above one day ; but that which was gathered on Friday kept sweet for two days ;

and 5. That it continued falling while the Israelites remained in the wilderness, but ceased as soon as they came out of it, and got corn to eat in the land of Canaan. 6. Let these very extraordinary particulars be considered, and they at once confirm the fact, whilst they unequivocally establish the miracle. No people could be deceived in these circumstances; no person could persuade them of their truth if they had not occurred; and the whole was so clearly out of the regular course of nature, as to mark unequivocally the interposition of God. To the majority of the numerous miracles recorded in the Old Testament, the same remarks apply, and upon them the same miraculous characters are as indubitably impressed."

To these remarks I may just add, that the fact of the antiquity, genuineness, and uncorrupted transmission of the books both of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, is sustained by an uninterrupted chain of evidence, which could be adduced in favour of no other document of a remote antiquity, and which ought to have shamed and for ever silenced the opponents

of revelation. Even enemies themselves have unwittingly served the cause of truth by adding to this testimony. The Jews are to this day, and have been through every past age, the effective and unanswerable defenders of their own canon; and the enemies of Christianity who arose in the second century and downwards, were valuable coadjutors of the Christian apologists, in alluding to the alleged facts of Christianity, though with a view to refute them. It would be easy to shew, not only that the Christian fathers, notwithstanding their many errors and absurdities, served the cause of revelation, by proving the antiquity, genuineness, and uncorrupted character of the sacred text; but that Clesus, and Porphyry, and Julian, to say nothing of the Roman historians, Tacitus and Suetonius, did an immense service, though they intended it not, in endeavouring to refute facts which, if they had never existed, could not have obtained currency in the world.

It is unreasonable, then, in the extreme to refuse credit to the facts of Christianity, standing as they do upon such an irrefragable basis.

God has spread over them the shield of omnipotence, and he who will not be convinced by a well-authenticated testimony of miracles, would not be persuaded though one actually rose from the dead.

As the resurrection of Christ is a fact of such vital moment in the argument connected with miracles, I shall devote to it the notice of a distinct discussion, hoping thereby to condense into very narrow limits the amount of proof arising to Christianity from the survey of its miraculous character.

2. *The argument derived from the Resurrection of Christ.*

It must have been remarked by every careful observer, that there are two distinct classes of miracles recorded in the gospel history,—those which the facts of Christianity themselves involve, and those which were wrought by our Lord and his apostles in confirmation of the message they delivered. The necessity, perhaps, of the latter class of miracles chiefly originates in the first. A revelation of facts and doctrines altogether supernatural seemed to de-

mand an attestation corresponding to its own nature. It is difficult, indeed, to conceive of the idea of an express and direct revelation from the Infinite Mind without instantly associating it with what is miraculous, and without feeling a sort of intuitive conviction that it will be supported with a species of evidence answering to the wondrous facts which it professes to disclose. Most of the doctrines of revelation far transcend the puny conceptions of finite minds, and some of them are of such a sublime nature that they are to be regarded rather as subjects of humble belief than as topics of querulous dispute.

The resurrection of Christ, in common with his incarnation, his temptation, his transfiguration, and his ascension to the right hand of power, is a fact of a distinctly miraculous character. It is, moreover, a fact which was divinely attested on the day of Pentecost, and, subsequently, by indubitable marks of a supernatural interposition.

For a person to rise from the dead is an indisputable manifestation of the mighty power of God ; and if it can be shewn that Christ actually

rose from the dead, according to his own predictions, it must of necessity follow that both the prescience and the omnipotence of Deity were associated with the wondrous event. Many sceptics have been ready to admit, that if the resurrection of Christ could be fully established their opposition to Christianity must cease. It was impossible for them to concede less than this; and the zealous efforts they have made to repudiate the evidence of our Lord's resurrection sufficiently proves their anxiety to get rid of a fact which, if properly established, must, as by some mighty convulsion, shiver infidelity to atoms.

As the doctrine contended for is of such vast importance to the full development of the truth of Christianity, it is a peculiarly happy circumstance that the evidence upon which it stands is of such a diversified and powerful kind; bearing, as it were, an exact proportion to the commanding position which it occupies in the Christian scheme. With the fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead, the whole system of Christianity

must stand or fall;* to bear witness to this fact the office of apostles was mainly established;† upon its reception our salvation vitally depends;‡ and by its all-powerful influence believers are inspired by the animating hope of eternal life.§

By this event, also, Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power;”|| by it the perfection of his atonement was fully announced;¶ and by it the evidence, pattern, and earnest of the resurrection of all his followers were strikingly displayed.** How momentous, then, upon the shewing of Christianity itself, is the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection! How firm ought our faith to be in the evidence by which it is supported! And how cautious and thoughtful ought *he* to be who ventures to treat it as an imposture of human device!

In briefly surveying the evidence upon which the doctrine of Christ’s resurrection rests, we

* 1 Cor. xv. 14—19. † Acts i. 22. iv. 33. x. 40, 41.

‡ Rom. x. 9. § 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. || Rom. i. 4.

¶ 1 Cor. xv. 17. Rom. iv. 25.

** 1 Cor. xv. 21, 22, 20, 23. Rom. viii. 11.

are naturally led to inquire whether his *death* actually took place? Here no conceivable difficulty can arise. The fact is admitted both by friends and enemies; and as the Jews procured his crucifixion and thirsted for his blood, there can be no reason to doubt that they would carry the infamous sentence of the law into complete execution. Fully aware of his own predictions that he would rise again, they did not suffer his body to be removed from the cross till every symptom of life was extinct; and so decisive were the marks of dissolution, that the soldiers, perceiving that he was already dead, did not break his legs, according to ordinary custom, when they wished to hasten the death of a particular culprit; but one of their number "pierced his side with a spear, and forthwith came thereout blood and water."* Nor did Pilate deliver up his body to be buried till he received direct assurance from the officers in command that the victim of Calvary had actually expired.

Nor was the place of Christ's burial less ma-

* John xix. 33, 34.

nifest than the fact of his death. No secrecy was attempted to be practised in this matter by Joseph of Arimathea, or any of the rest of Christ's disciples. The request, indeed, that they might be put in possession of the body of Jesus was complied with; but all their movements were watched with nicest scrutiny, and a Roman watch of *sixty* soldiers was instantly set over the place of sepulture.

That Christ died, then, and was buried, no one can doubt. Jews and heathens confirm the facts. Yet in a period short of three full days, notwithstanding the strict watch of a Roman guard, the body of Christ, by the admission of the disciples and Pharisees, is removed from the tomb. A rumour of the fact instantly spreads, and enemies and friends have each their particular mode of accounting for it. Which account, then, bears upon it the signature of truth—the disciples' or the Jews'? They cannot be both true, for they are contradictory. The disciples say that two women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome,* had repaired

* Mark xvi. 1—8. Luke xxiv. 1—12.

to the sepulchre for the purpose of perfuming the body of Christ with Eastern spices, and that an angel appeared to them, rolling away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and inviting them, in the language of condescension, to look into the now empty tomb, where their Lord had been placed on the evening of the crucifixion, but from whence he had now risen in the exercise of an omnipotent power ; it is moreover stated by the disciples, that the women received commission from the angel to announce the fact of Christ's resurrection to the rest of his followers. From the same source we learn, that others subsequently repaired to the tomb and found the body of Christ removed, and only the linen in which it was wrapped left behind ; that the fact of an actual resurrection was demonstrated by the appearance of Christ to several of his disciples, both alone and in full assembly ; that the eye saw him, that the hand touched him, that the mind entered into fellowship with him, that some enjoyed the benefit of his conversation, partook of food with him, listened to his instructions, received his commands, and for the space

of more than five weeks, had more or less intercourse with him ; when, at the end of this period, and after he had given commission to his apostles, he finally conducted his disciples to a mountain in Galilee, and rose to his native heavens in their admiring presence.

Such is the account of Christ's resurrection as furnished by his friends. And what is there in the opposite scale ? Nothing whatever. It is said, indeed, by the Sanhedrim, that the disciples stole the body of Jesus while the watch slept ! This is verily all, in the shape of fact, that the Jews ever attempted to oppose to the combined testimony of the disciples ; and it is so utterly absurd, that nothing but the consternation occasioned by the astounding fact of the resurrection could have tempted them to induce the watch, by an act of bribery, to make such a statement. Either the watch were asleep or awake : if awake, how could an armed body of sixty men have allowed the disciples to rob the tomb of its sacred inhabitant ? and if asleep, how could they bear testimony to the fact of the disciples' theft ? This wild and extravagant fabrication, however, was

speedily abandoned. Not once is it adverted to on those trials of the apostles which soon took place at Jerusalem, on account of their bold and open proclamation of their Master's resurrection. Though the apostles were cited before that very body who had given currency to the report of the disciples' theft, they are not even once taxed with the crime; not a whisper escapes the lips of the Sanhedrim on the subject; not one of all the watch is brought forward to confront the apostles, and to shame them out of their adherence to the imposture of the resurrection; on the contrary, an influential member of the Jewish council advises forbearance to the witnesses of the resurrection; and intimates even the possibility of the event itself.* If the Sanhedrim had had the slightest belief of the wicked story invented, would they have adopted such a course? Undoubtedly not. Now was the time to muster all their strong evidence against the facts of the resurrection, and to prevent its further currency among the people; but nothing whatever of this kind is resorted to;

* Acts v. 33-40.

persecution and threats are the only weapons employed to check the rising doctrine; and a whole assembly of men, deeply involved in the consequences of the resurrection, not only succumb to the counsel of an individual, but apparently acquiesce in the hypothetical admission that the entire doctrine of the apostles may yet prove itself to be of God.

There is not, then, an atom of contradictory testimony to the fact of the resurrection as stated by the apostles. If we reject their account, we are left in a state of the wildest conjecture as to what became of the body of Jesus. Look, then, at their testimony, and see if it bears along with it the credentials of truth. Upon a review of the gospel history itself, was there any thing improbable in the occurrence of Christ's resurrection? Did he not again and again, in the presence of friends and enemies, predict the event, and point to it as the great seal of his mission? and did he not furnish examples of the same mighty power in the resurrection of Lazarus, and of the widow's son, as well as in many other demonstrations of his eternal power and godhead?

Before any one can shew that the event of Christ's resurrection was one by no means to be anticipated, he must disprove the entire facts of our Lord's history, and thereby subvert the testimony of Heathens, Jews, and Christians. The question is, were the apostles deceived, or did they attempt to deceive others? The former of these could not have been the case; for they had every opportunity of identifying their Lord's person, which could possibly be furnished, or which could ever be regarded, by the most scrupulous, as necessary. The very doubts of their own minds contributed to add strength to the conviction which they acquired of their Lord's identity; and for the space of full forty days, they were enabled, in a succession of interviews, to correct any sudden or erroneous impression, and to settle themselves in the triumphant belief that Christ was risen indeed.

Nor was there one sign of an impostor or deceiver attaching to these simple-hearted witnesses of the resurrection. There is no attempt to furnish one uniform record of the transaction. On the contrary, we have four different accounts

of the resurrection, so distinct as to shew that each writer aimed at truth, and was under no apprehension of discrepancy in his statements; and yet so entirely harmonious that the apparent contradictions only tend to establish the validity and perfect consistency of the history.*

It may be asked, moreover, when and where did the apostles of our Lord begin to proclaim the fact of the resurrection? Why, at the very period of its alleged occurrence, and in the very city of the crucifixion. When they were once convinced of the glorious event themselves, they were bold as lions in its defence, and were not afraid to give utterance to their convictions in the presence of those who must have possessed the best means of detecting the imposture, if any such had been practised. The most subtle and disputatious of the Jewish nation heard their testimony; malice, and wit, and power, were all enlisted against them; but the new doctrine

* See a Discourse by Dr. J. P. Smith "on the Evidence of the Divine Origin of Christianity from the Resurrection of Jesus," in a volume of Lectures delivered at the monthly meetings.

prevailed, and fresh instances of miraculous power, in the gift of tongues, and in the ability to heal all manner of diseases, accredited the apostles as the commissioned servants of the Most High. .

“In all other things,” observes the late Mr. Scott, “they appeared simple, upright, holy men; but if in this they deceived, the world never yet produced a company of such artful and wicked impostors, whose schemes were so deeply laid, so admirably conducted, and so extensively and permanently successful. For they spent all the rest of their lives in promoting the religion of Jesus, renouncing every earthly interest, facing all kinds of opposition and persecution, bearing contempt and ignominy, prepared habitually to seal their testimony with their blood, and most of them actually dying martyrs in the cause, recommending it with their latest breath as worthy of universal acceptance. It is likewise observable, that, when they went forth to preach Christ as risen from the dead, they were manifestly changed, in almost every respect, from what they before had been,—their timidity gave

place to the most undaunted courage; their carnal prejudices vanished; their ambitious contests ceased; their narrow views were immensely expanded; and zeal for the honour of the Lord, with love to the souls of men, seem to have engrossed and elevated all the powers of their minds. A more complete human testimony to any event cannot be imagined; for if our Lord had shewn himself 'openly to all the people' of the Jews, and their rulers had still persisted in rejecting him, it would have rather weakened than confirmed the evidence; and, if they had unanimously received him as Messiah, it might have excited in others a suspicion that it was a plan concerted for aggrandizing the nation."*

3. *The argument derived from Prophecy.*

This is a branch of Christian evidence possessing extraordinary power, and capable of very extensive application. The proper idea of prophecy is *the foretelling of such future events as no human skill or sagacity could anticipate, and as nothing but the prescience of the Eternal could*

* See the Rev. Thomas Scott's Works, vol. ii. pp. 15, 16.

either know or reveal. This is the test applied of old to the false gods of the heathen—"Shew us," said Jehovah to their votaries, "what shall happen; declare us things for to come; shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods."* If it can be shewn that the leading facts recorded in Scripture were foretold by omniscience long ere they occurred, it will follow of necessity that a revelation thus accredited is from God. Prophecy is, indeed, a species of miraculous attestation challenging the investigation of men in every age, and accumulating new materials of proof as the revolutions of Divine Providence disclose and illustrate the events embodied in the prophetic testimony.

The great object and end of the prophetic dispensation was evidently to testify "before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow,"† and to this object and end all the predictions of Scripture might be shewn more or less to contribute.

I shall begin, therefore, with those prophecies

* Isa. xli. 22, 23.

† 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

which relate more immediately to the Messiah ; and if it should appear, from a survey of facts, that there were many prophecies uttered concerning Him which no human skill or fore-thought could have ventured to announce, and which have realized a minute and circumstantial accomplishment,—it will then follow, that they furnish a convincing testimony to his character as the Son of God, and to his mission as the Saviour of the world. We shall first make the induction of the prophetic testimony, and then inquire how far it is probable that the prophecies of the Jewish Scriptures could have induced the followers of Jesus of Nazareth to endeavour, by their own means, to bring about the events predicted—in other words, to produce a coincidence in the life of Jesus to the anticipations of the prophets.

The minuteness both of the predictions and the fulfilments will, perhaps, surprise those who have not closely examined this most interesting topic. In the texts referred to in the notes, the prophecy and its accomplishment will be placed in immediate contact, so that those who wish to

examine this subject for themselves may see how utterly impossible it was for any thing like chance or human imposture to have furnished such an exquisite harmony.*

When we look at the very first page of man's apostacy, we find the Great Deliverer promised, as that seed of the woman who was to bruise the head of the serpent.† This mysterious personage was to be of the seed of Abraham.‡ He was to belong to the tribe of Judah.§ He was to be a member of the royal house of David.|| He was to be born at Bethlehem Judah, the city of David.¶ He was to be miraculously conceived and born of a virgin.** He was to be carried

* See a very able Discourse on "the Object and End of the Prophetic Dispensation," by the late Archibald M'Lean. Works, vol. iv. 12mo. p. 283.

† Compare Gen. iii. 15. with Luke i. 29—36. and Gal. iv. 4.

‡ Com. Gen. xxii. 18. with Gal. iii. 16, 17. and Heb. ii. 16.

§ Com. Gen. xlix. 10. with Heb. vii. 14.

|| Com. 1 Sam. vii. 12—17. Isa. xi. 1—6. Jer. xxiii. 5, 6. with Luke i. 32, 69. Rom. i. 3.

¶ Com. Micah v. 2. with Matt. ii. 1, 5, 6. and Luke ii. 4, 11.

** Com. Isa. vii. 14. with Matt. i. 20—24.

into Egypt, and called out of it.* He was to have Elias, or John the Baptist as his forerunner.† He was to confirm his mission and doctrine by miracles.‡ He was to make a public though lowly entrance into Jerusalem, riding upon a colt, the foal of an ass.§ He was to be rejected of his own countrymen the Jews.|| He was to be betrayed by one of his disciples.¶ He was to be sold for thirty pieces of silver.** He was to be scourged, mocked, and spit upon.†† He was to be nailed to the cross, by his hands and his feet.‡‡ He was to be numbered with the

* Compare Hos. xi. 1. with Matt. ii. 13—16.

† Com. Isa. xl. 3, 4. Mal. iii. 1. and iv. 5. with Matt. iii. 1—4. xvii. 10—14. Luke i. 17. vii. 27.

‡ Com. Isa. xxxv. 5, 6. with Matt. xi. 3—7. John v. 36. and Acts ii. 22.

§ Com. Zech. ix. 9. and Psalms cxviii. 25, 26. with Matt. xxi. 2—12. and John xii. 12—19.

|| Com. Isa. viii. 14, 15. xviii. 16. liii. 3. and Psa. cxviii. 22. with Matt. xxi. 42—45. John i. 10, 11. xii. 37—40. and xv. 22—26.

¶ Com. Psa. xli. 9. with John xiii. 18.

** Com. Zech. xi. 12. with Matt. xxvi. 14, 15. and xxvii. 3—11.

†† Com. Isa. l. 6. with Matt. xxvi. 67, 68. and xxvii. 26—32.

‡‡ Com. Psa. xxii. 16. with Luke xxiii. 33. and John xix. 17, 18.

transgressors.* He was to be mocked and reviled while on the cross.† He was to have gall and vinegar to drink.‡ His garments were to be parted, and upon his vesture lots were to be cast.§ He was to be cut off from the land of the living by a violent death.|| He was to be pierced, but not a bone of him to be broken.¶ He was to make his grave with the rich.** He was not to see corruption.†† He was to rise from the dead.‡‡ He was to ascend into heaven, sit at the right hand of God, and pour out the Holy Spirit in his various gifts upon men.§§

* Com. Isa. liii. 12. with Luke xxii. 37. and xxiii. 33.

† Com. Psal. xxii. 7, 8. with Matt. xxvii. 34, 35.

‡ Com. Psal. lxix. 21. with Matt. xxvii. 34, 48.

§ Com. Psal. xxii. 18. with Matt. xxvii. 35. and John xix. 23, 24.

|| Com. Isa. liii. Dan ix. 26. with John xix. 30. Acts ii. 23.

¶ Com. Zech. xii. 10. Exod. xii. 46. Psal. xxxiv. 20. with John xix. 33—36.

** Com. Isa. liii. 9. with Matt. xxvii. 57—61.

†† Com. Psal. xvi. 10. with Acts ii. 25—32. xiii. 34—38.

‡‡ Com. Psal. ii. 7. xvi. 11. and Isa. liii. 8. with Acts ii. 30, 31. xiii. 33, 34.

§§ Com. Psal. lxxviii. 18. and ex. i. Joel. ii. 28. with Eph. iv. 8—13. Mark xvi. 19. Acts ii. 33.

His divine dignity was also distinctly marked in the prophetic testimony. According to the flesh, he was to be of the seed of David; but beyond this there was a view of his character which exhibited him in all the glory of essential and uncreated Godhead. He was to be called Immanuel.* He was described as the mighty God.† He was spoken of as Jehovah our righteousness.‡ He was portrayed as the Son of God.§ He was declared to be David's Lord.||

Nor were the offices which Messiah was to sustain overlooked by the omniscient spirit of the prophetic dispensation. He was to be a prophet like unto Moses.¶ He was to be a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec.** He was to be an anointed King, on Zion's holy

* Com. Isa. vii. 14. with Mark i. 23.

† Com. Isa. ix. 6. with Tit. ii. 13.

‡ Com. Jer. xxxiii. 5, 6. with 1 Cor. i. 30, 31.

§ Com. 2 Sam. vii. 14. Psa. ii. 7, 12. with Rom. i. 3, 4. Heb. i. 5.

¶ Com. Psa. cx. 1. with Matt. xxii. 42—46.

¶ Com. Deut. xviii. 18. with Acts iii. 22—24.

** Com. Psa. cx. 4. with Heb. v. 5, 6. vii. viii. ix. x.

hill,—that is, the Messiah and Sovereign of his church.*

In like manner the spiritual empire of the Son of God is portrayed in the prophetic page. Its nature, its extent, its duration, its blessedness, its happy subjects, are all described.† And though many of the predictions which relate to that empire are not yet fulfilled, and though some of them will not realize their accomplishment till the consummation of all things; yet enough has been fulfilled to shew that Christ and his kingdom are the distinct objects of reference, and that what is yet unaccomplished shall ere long have the light of Divine Providence shed upon it.

When I look at the number, minuteness, and singular character of the prophetic testimonies of the Jewish Scriptures to Messiah, and compare them with their exact and circumstantial accom-

* Com. *Psa.* ii. 6. *Psa.* ii. 2. *Dan.* ix. 26. with *John* xx. 30, 31. *Acts* ii. 36.

† Com. *Psa.* xlv. 6, 7. *Isa.* ix. 6—8. xi. 1—11. xlix. 6. with *Gal.* iii. 8. *Heb.* i. 8, 9. *Luke* i. 30—34. *Rom.* xiv. 12. *Acts* xiii. 47.

plishment in the person, office, and empire of Jesus of Nazareth, I am equally astounded at the unbelief of Jews and Infidels. How can they resist such a flood of light? Upon any conceivable scheme of adjustment, how can they, in their present state of mind, account for the predictions and their fulfilment! Let it be remembered that Christians did not construct the prophecies; they formed part of a document in the hands of their bitterest enemies; and let it be equally remembered, that the principal facts in the history of the Son of God which verify the prophecies, were realities which the most inveterate infidels have been compelled to admit. Let the wondrous coincidence, then, be accounted for on any other principle but the admission of a great scheme of prophecy originating in the divine prescience, and intended to vindicate the claims of a revelation which has been vouchsafed by God to his bewildered and erring children.

I know of no method of evading the force of the argument derived from prophecy, but by the supposition, that the apostles of our Lord, finding in the Jewish Scriptures a vast number of pre-

dictive statements, concerning an illustrious personage who was to rise up in the nation of Israel, accommodated themselves, with their leader, to the scheme thus perceived by them. But the entire character and conduct of the men, their benevolence, their contempt for every thing like human ambition and applause, the purity and integrity of their manners, their fearless exposure of themselves to persecution and death, the total absence of any thing like inferior motive to sustain them, forbids us, upon all the ordinary calculations of human nature, to conceive of them as heartless deceivers and villains. If they were so, it may be safely affirmed that they acted a part the very opposite of all the other impostors that ever lived.

But supposing they were deceivers, and that they made themselves agents to the fulfilment of the Jewish prophecies; let us see how this can be borne out by the facts of the case. This inquiry is so well met by the present Bishop of Chester, that I cannot do a greater service to my readers than to quote his own words on the subject.

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"It may be thought," says he, "that a design like that attributed to the followers of Jesus would be greatly assisted by the prophecies recorded in their national Scriptures, and pointing to some remarkable personage who was expected to appear.

"1. For example: the time of this appearance was fixed by the prophet Daniel at about four hundred and ninety years from his own days; which so closely corresponded with the birth of Jesus, that such an event was looked for, by 'devout persons,' at the very period when it occurred.* This would be, as was before observed, a circumstance greatly in their favour.

"2. The next thing to be considered by the framer of this deceit, would be the place of their leader's birth. Jesus was born at Bethlehem. Upon consulting their Scriptures, they would find this passage respecting Bethlehem: 'Thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the

* Dan. ix. 24. Luke ii. 25.

ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, for everlasting.* This would prove, beyond what could be anticipated, an assistance of their design.

“3. It seemed to be intimated in the prophecies, that the deliverer who was to come should be preceded by a forerunner, who might awaken the attention of the people to him. For it was written, ‘The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’† And again, ‘Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come into his temple.’‡ Now it was notorious that a singular character, John, called ‘the Baptist,’ had appeared a short time before Jesus began his ministry, pretending to be this messenger, and nothing more, and directing his followers to one who was to ‘come after him.’ This was another coincidence equally wonderful and favourable.

* Micah v. 3. † Isa. xl. 3. ‡ Malachi iii. 1.

"4. Further, as to the most important parts: the way in which Jesus had lived, and had been received, and died. His character, as represented in the Gospels, had been peculiar in every respect; but especially remarkable for the union of meekness and constancy which it displayed.

"Of unknown origin and humble parentage, he had attracted considerable notice, and many followers: yet he had not been generally acknowledged among his countrymen, and those who adhered to him were not the great and powerful. His life, upon the whole, was one of trial and hardship, not one of triumph and exaltation. In the end, he was sentenced to death with the notorious wicked: and suffered a punishment, which even his judge confessed that he merited, but not deserved. Yet, though dying with malefactors, he was laid in a rich and honourable tomb."

"A singular circumstance in his history was, that he was crucified on the cross, and always

been considered as most particular in what respected the future Messiah.*

"It cannot be denied that the existence of these ancient prophecies would be very advantageous to men setting out with the purpose in question. But it is time to ask in our turn, how they came to find these prophecies ready to their hand?—prophecies of such a nature, that no man could have contrived a scheme dependent upon them, because they could not command the fact by which they were to be fulfilled. With respect to the birth-place, for example: in order that it might happen to be Bethlehem, it was requisite that a general census should be held, convening all the inhabitants of the country to their chief town; by which means alone the mother of Jesus was called away from her usual residence, and her infant born at Bethlehem, instead of Nazareth. The preparatory ministry of the Baptist was equally beyond the control of the disciples. So were the minute details of incidents, which agree in a wonderful manner with the circumstantial narrative. The entrance

* Isaiah liii. 1—9.

of Jesus into Jerusalem, at once humble and triumphant.* The manner of his death, and his own countrymen the cause.† The peculiar indignities which he underwent: the very words of mockery used against him.‡ The price which Judas received for his treachery. The purpose to which that money was applied.§

“Passages of this nature could not have been introduced by the apostles into the existing scriptures, because, as their countrymen were generally hostile to the design, such an attempt must have proved fatal to their pretensions. And further, because the books among which these scattered sentences are found, had now been extensively diffused during a period of three hundred years in a foreign language, defying the imposture of the whole nation, if the whole nation had concurred in the design.

“We are reduced, then, to the necessity of supposing that the followers of Jesus, desiring

* Com. Matt. xxi. 1, &c. with Zech. ix. 9.

† Zech. xiii. 6.

‡ Com. Isa. l. 6. Ps. xxii., lxix. 20. with Matt. xxvii.

§ Com. Zech. xi. 12. with Matt. xxvi. 15. xxvii. 3. &c.

to deify their teacher, selected from their national Scriptures these pointed allusions to circumstances like his, which happened to be written there, and brought them forward to confirm his pretensions.

“ But surely to ascribe coincidences like these to chance, to allege that all these passages were thrown out at random in the Jewish Scriptures, and that the circumstances of the birth, and life, and character, and death of Jesus, turned out so as to agree with them, is to attribute to chance what never did or could take place by chance; and in itself far more improbable than the event which such a solution is intended to disprove. For, allow to Jesus the authority which he claims, and every difficulty vanishes. We should then expect to find prophetic intimations of his great purpose, and of the way in which it was to be effected. We should expect to find them, too, just what they are; not united and brought together in a way of formal description, which could only be a provision for imposture; but such scattered hints and allusions as, after the event has occurred, serve to shew that

it was predicted, by a comparison of the event and the prophecy.

“It ought to be observed, in addition, that if the disciples of Jesus had framed their story and their representation of facts, with a view of obtaining this collateral support, they would have been more diligent and ostentatious in pointing out the circumstances of resemblance. They would have anticipated the labours of those writers who have made it their business to shew the completion of prophecy in the events related in the gospels. But, on the contrary, they bring these things forward in an historical rather than an argumentative way, and commonly leave the deductions which may be drawn from them to the discernment of after times.”*

I must be allowed to remark, before dismissing this branch of evidence, that though the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments chiefly relate to the Messiah, and are all so con-

* “The Evidence of Christianity derived from its Nature and Reception.” By John Bird Sumner, D.D., Lord Bishop of Chester. *Fourth Edition.* 12mo. pp. 124—133.

structed as, in their accomplishment, to add strength to the evidence which confirms the Christian revelation, they are by no means confined to the delineation of his character and claims. They occupy a range most extensive, and carry the mind over the eventful history of the Jewish nation, and of almost all the nations of heathen antiquity. Let it never be forgotten, that Nineveh's predicted ruin has come upon it;*—that Babylon, in all its boasted splendour, has been "swept with the besom of threatened destruction;"†—that Tyre, the great port of the ancient world, has become, according to the warnings of Ezekiel, a place only for the drying of fishermen's nets;‡—that Egypt, the mother of arts, has become "the basest of kingdoms," and has never since been able "to exalt herself among the nations," as if to shew that all the events of futurity are naked and open to that omniscient Spirit who foretold her doom, and predicted her permanent humiliation.§

* Nahum i. ii. iii.

† Ezek. xxvi. 4, 5.

† Isa. xlii. xiv.

§ Ezek. xxix. 14, 15.

Nor, in contemplating the great scheme of prophecy, and the support which it yields to the truth of Revelation, must we lose sight of the destinies of the Jewish nation.* In the fearful destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army,—in the dispersion and long-continued peculiarity of the seed of Abraham,—in the contempt, per-

* “The great lawgiver of the Jews,” observes Mr. Horne, (in his Introduction, vol. i. p. 327,) “foretold that they should be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, —scattered among all people, from one end of the earth, even unto the other,—find no ease or rest,—be oppressed and crushed always,—be left few in number among the heathen,—pine away in their iniquity in their enemies’ land,—and become an astonishment, a proverb, and a bye-word unto all nations. These predictions were literally fulfilled during their subjection to the Chaldeans and Romans; and, in later times, in all the nations where they have been dispersed. Moses foretold that their enemies would besiege and take their cities; and this prophecy was fulfilled by Shishak, King of Egypt; Shalmaneser, King of Assyria; Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, Epiphanes, Sosius, and Herod; and finally by Titus. Moses foretold that such grievous famines should prevail during those sieges, that they should eat the flesh of their sons and daughters. This prediction was fulfilled about six hundred years after the time of Moses, when Samaria was besieged by the King of Syria; also, about nine hundred years after that time, among the Jews, during the siege of Jerusalem, before the Babylonish captivity; and finally, fifteen hundred years after, at the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. Though the Hebrews

secution, and infamy which they have so long endured,—in the promulgation of the gospel among Gentile tribes,—in the many and hateful corruptions of the religion of Jesus which have been introduced through the medium of Anti-Christian powers,—and in the preservation and growing triumphs of the Christian faith, we

were to be as the stars of heaven for multitude, Moses predicted that they should be few in number, and his prophecy was fulfilled: for, in the last siege of Jerusalem, Josephus tells us that an infinite multitude perished by famine; and he computes the total number who perished by it, and by the war in Jerusalem, and other parts of Judea, at *one million two hundred and forty thousand four hundred and ninety*, besides *ninety-nine thousand two hundred* who were made prisoners, and sold unto their enemies for bondmen and bondwomen; and after their last overthrow by Hadrian, many thousands of them were sold; and those for whom purchasers could not be found (Moses foretold that *no man would buy them*) were transported into Egypt, where they perished by shipwreck or famine, or were massacred by the inhabitants. Since the destruction of Jerusalem, they have been scattered among all nations; among whom they have found no ease, nor have the soles of their feet had rest; they have been oppressed and spoiled ever more, especially in the east, where the tyranny exercised over them is so severe, as to afford a literal fulfilment of the prediction of Moses,—*Thy life shall hang in doubt before thee, and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have no assurance of thy life*. Yet, notwithstanding all their oppressions, they have still continued a separate

have such indubitable fulfilments of the prophetic record, that he who refuses to embrace, as divine, the wondrous volume of which it forms such a distinguished part, sins against all the laws of moral evidence, and, at the same time, risks his eternal salvation by rejecting the counsel of God against himself.

4. *The Evidence of Christianity derived from a correct estimate of its early success.*

It would be most inconclusive to infer the super-

people, without incorporating with the nations; and they have become an astonishment and a bye-word among all the nations whither they have been carried since their punishment has been inflicted. The very name of a Jew has been used as a term of peculiar reproach and infamy. Finally, it was foretold, that *their plagues should be wonderful, even great plagues, and of long continuance.* And have not their plagues continued more than seventeen hundred years? In comparison of them, their former captivities were very short; during their captivity in Chaldea, Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied; but now they have no true prophet to foretel the end of their calamities. What nation has suffered so much, and yet endured so long? What nation has subsisted as a distinct people in their own country so long as the Jews have done in their dispersion into all countries? And what a **STANDING MIRACLE** is thus exhibited to the world in the fulfilment, at this very time, of prophecies delivered considerably more than three thousand years ago! What a permanent attestation is it to the divine legation of Moses!"

natural origin of Christianity from the mere fact of its success ; inasmuch as some of the greatest impostures the world ever knew have obtained, for many ages, a most powerful and extensive dominion over the human mind. The early prevalence of the gospel is, in itself, no decisive proof of its divine origin. Ere it can be regarded as such, a number of circumstances must combine with the fact of its success, which admit of no just or rational solution but the admission of the finger of God. The question then is, did such circumstances evince themselves in the early triumphs of Christianity ? And, if they did, wherein did they consist ? and how do they admit of being exhibited in the shape of a conclusive argument for the truth and divinity of the gospel ?

It is then a fact that Jesus of Nazareth was put to death in the reign of Tiberius, by the order of Pontius Pilate, his Procurator.* It is a fact that as early as the time of Claudius, who died within twenty years of the crucifixion, the religious assemblies of the Christians were pro-

* See Tacitus, *Annal.* xv. 44.

scribed under open pretext that they were withdrawing men from the worship of the gods.* It is a fact, that in the reign of Nero, the followers of Christ endured persecutions of the most fearful kind, and that this wicked despot endeavoured to fix upon them the stigma of burning Rome, though it was justly and loudly charged on himself.† It is a fact that Pliny the younger,

* See Suetonius in Claud. 25.

† See Tacitus, as above. I give Paley's translation. "But neither these exertions, nor his largesses to the people, nor his offerings to the gods, did away the infamous imputation under which Nero lay, of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To put an end therefore to this report, he laid the guilt and inflicted the most cruel punishments upon a set of people who were held in abhorrence for their crimes, and called by the vulgar, Christians. The founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the reign of Tiberius, under his Procurator, Pontius Pilate. The pernicious superstition, thus checked for awhile, broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, where the evil originated, but through Rome also, whither every thing bad upon earth finds its way, and is practised. Some who confessed their sect were first seized; and afterwards, by their information, a vast multitude were apprehended, who were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning Rome, as of hatred to mankind. Their sufferings and their execution were aggravated by insult and mockery, for some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts and worried to death by dogs, some were crucified, and others were wrapt in pitched shirts and set on fire when the days closed, that they might

a Proconsul under the Emperor Trajan; who was contemporary with Ignatius, and who flourished about seventy-five years after the death of Christ, describes the Christian assemblies in Bithynia and Pontus as consisting of "a vast multitude"* of all ages and sexes, and speaks of

serve as lights to illuminate the night. Nero lent his own gardens for these executions; and exhibited at the same time a mock Circensian entertainment, being a spectator of the whole in the dress of a charioteer, sometimes mingling with the crowd on foot, and sometimes viewing the spectacle from his car. This conduct made the sufferers pitied; and though they were criminals, and deserving the severest punishments, yet they were considered as sacrificed, not so much out of regard to the public good, as to gratify the cruelty of one man."

* "*Ingens multitudo*," a vast multitude, is the historian's expression. I insert the whole letter according to Milner's translation, though he has not preserved the full force of the original in his rendering of this expression.

"*C. Pliney to Trajan, Emperor.*"

"Health.—It is my usual custom, Sir, to refer all things of which I harbour any doubts, to you. For who can better direct my judgment in its hesitation, or instruct my understanding in its ignorance? I never had the fortune to be present at any examination of Christians before I came into this province. I am, therefore, at a loss to determine what is the usual object either of inquiry or of punishment, and to what length either of them is to be carried. It has also been with me a question very problematical, whether any distinction should be made between the young and the old, the tender and the robust;

Christianity as an inveterate superstition, which

—whether any room should be given for repentance, or the guilt of Christianity once incurred is not to be expiated by the most unequivocal retraction;—whether the name itself, abstracted from any flagitiousness of conduct, or the crimes connected with the name, be the object of punishment. In the mean time, this has been my method, with respect to those who were brought before me as Christians. I asked them whether they were Christians: if they pleaded guilty, I interrogated them twice afresh, with a menace of capital punishment. In case of obstinate perseverance, I ordered them to be executed. For of this I had no doubt, whatever was the nature of their religion, that a sullen and obstinate inflexibility called for the vengeance of the magistrate. Some were infected with the same madness whom, on account of their privilege of citizenship, I reserved to be sent to Rome to be referred to your tribunal. In the course of this business, informations pouring in, as is usual when they are encouraged, more cases occurred. An anonymous libel was exhibited, with a catalogue of names of persons, who yet declared that they were not Christians then, or ever had been; and they repeated after me an invocation of the gods and of your image, which, for this purpose, I had ordered to be brought with the images of the deities;—they performed sacred rites with wine and frankincense, and execrated Christ; none of which things, I am told, a real Christian can ever be compelled to do. On this account I dismissed them. Others, named by an informer, first affirmed, and then denied the charge of Christianity; declaring that they had been Christians, but had ceased to be so; some three years ago, others still longer, some even twenty years ago. All of them worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and also execrated Christ. And this was the account which they gave of the nature of the religion they once had professed, whether it

had spread itself, not only through cities, but

deserves the name of crime or error ;—namely, that they were accustomed, on a stated day, to meet before day-light, and to repeat among themselves an hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath, with an obligation of not committing any wickedness, but, on the contrary, of abstaining from thefts, robberies, and adulteries ;—also, of not violating their promise, or denying a pledge ;—after which, it was their custom to separate, and meet again at a promiscuous harmless meal, from which last practice they however desisted after the publication of my edict, in which, agreeably to your orders, I forbade any societies of that sort ; on which account, I judged it the more necessary to inquire, BY TORTURE, from two females, who were said to be deaconesses, what is the real truth. But nothing could I collect, except a depraved and excessive superstition. Deferring, therefore, any further investigation, I determined to consult you ; for the number of culprits is so great, as to call for serious consultation. Many persons are informed against, of every age, and both sexes ; and more still will be in the same situation. The contagion of the superstition hath spread, not only through cities, but even villages and the country. Not that I think it impossible to check and to correct it. The success of my endeavours hitherto forbids such desponding thoughts ; for the temples, once almost desolate, begin to be frequented, and the sacred solemnities, which had long been intermitted, are now attended afresh ; and the sacrificial victims are now sold everywhere, which once could scarce find a purchaser. Whence I conclude, that many might be reclaimed were the hope of impunity, on repentance, absolutely confirmed.”

The Emperor Trajan's reply to Pliny.

“ You have done perfectly right, my dear Pliny, in the inquiry which you have made concerning Christians. For

over villages and the whole country.* It is a fact, that Christian churches were established in every province of the Roman empire within a very brief period of the death of Christ,† and that thousands and tens of thousands of new converts maintained, with unshaken confidence, their adherence to the facts and promises of the gospel amidst the heaviest persecutions and calamities that ever befel mortals in this vale of tears. It is a fact that the first propagators of Christianity were only fishermen of Galilee, and that they sought and obtained no aid from human

truly no one general rule can be laid down which will apply itself to all cases. These people must not be sought after; if they are brought before you and convicted, let them be capitally punished, yet with this restriction, that if any renounce Christianity, and evidence his sincerity by supplicating our gods, however suspected he may be for the past, he shall obtain pardon for the future, on his repentance. But anonymous libels in no case ought to be attended to; for the precedent would be of the worst sort, and perfectly incongruous to the maxims of my government."

* See Plin. Epist. Lib. x. Ep. 91.

† "The rapidity and extent of the propagation of the gospel were such as to prove its divine origin. On the very first day of its promulgation, three thousand were converted; these soon increased to five thousand. Multitudes, both of men and women, were afterwards daily

power in the prosecution of their extraordinary undertaking. It is a fact, that the experiment of Christianity was made in one of the most enlightened and refined periods in the history of the world, and on a theatre which laid it open to the scrutiny and detection of all Greece and Rome. It is a fact, that the first messengers of the cross entered into no compromise with the vices and corruptions of mankind, but that they denounced every system of evil, and sought only to win men's applause by bringing them to perceive and acknowledge the exquisite loveliness

added to the new religion. Before the end of thirty years, the gospel had spread through Judæa, Galilee, Samaria, almost all the numerous districts of Lesser Asia; through Greece, and the Islands of the *Ægean Sea*, and the sea-coast of Africa, and had passed on to the capital of Italy. Great multitudes believed at Antioch in Syria, at Joppa, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, Berræa, Iconium, Derbe, Antioch in Pisidia, at Lydda and Saron. Converts, also, are mentioned at Tyre, Cæsarea, Troas, Athens, Philippi, Lystra, Damascus. Thus far the sacred narrative conducts us. The religion being thus widely diffused, the New Testament carries us no further. But all ecclesiastical and profane history concurs in describing the rapid progress of the new doctrine. Tacitus, Suetonius, Juvenal, Pliny, Martial, Marcus Aurelius, sufficiently testify the propagation of Christianity."—See Bishop Wilson's *Evidences*, vol. i. p. 260, 12mo.

of truth, and by teaching them to submit to a course of religious and moral discipline, which made them kind and forgiving, peaceful and holy. It is a fact, that the doctrine taught by the Apostles of Jesus of Nazareth was, in many respects, new; that it proclaimed facts of a strictly miraculous nature; that it sternly opposed every existing system of religion; that it rebuked and condemned those vices and depraved habits which universally prevailed; that, nevertheless, it rapidly spread, and that in less than three centuries it subverted the religion of pagan Rome, and established itself on the throne of the Cæsars.

Had Christianity been adapted to the depraved inclinations of the human heart; had it flattered men's pride, ambition, and vain-glory; had it promised or secured worldly honour and prosperity; had it been hailed by the great and noble of mankind; had it been supported by human power, and defended by the swords and shields of the earth; had conquering armies been its heralds, and the spoils of enemies its rewards,—its success would then have been no

mystery, and its triumphs would then have afforded no proof of supernatural interference. But if the reverse of all this was the case,—if Christianity had nothing in it to pamper human corruption,—nothing to minister to the pride of the human heart, —nothing to present to its disciples in the shape of worldly allurements,—nothing to draw around it men of high renown,—nothing of power to terrify or subdue,—nothing to support the courage of its professors but the testimony of a good conscience and the hopes of a better life,—what shall be said if after all it triumphed? Yes, if while it opposes itself to all the world it prevail, what shall be said?—if in the absence of all the ordinary causes and weapons of success it prevail, what shall be said? Let us look at the facts of this case, and impartially determine if there was any thing merely human in the original agencies of Christianity to account for the results which followed their employment. The *results* are these:—the whole Roman empire, in a few short years, was pervaded by the gospel,—multitudes of Jews and Pagans were won over to the sincere belief of the

facts of Christianity,—the very aspects and institutions of society were completely changed and re-modelled by the new doctrine,—the flames of persecution were borne with exemplary fortitude, patience, and forgiveness, — the cause triumphed by means of its very disasters,—and the power which attempted to crush it at last yielded to its mysterious influence.

Such are the results; — and what are the apparent agencies by which they were effected? — The doctrine of ONE who was crucified at Jerusalem between two thieves,—the preaching of a few illiterate fishermen of Galilee,—and the exemplary zeal and consistency of those who ranked themselves as the disciples of the cross.

If, then, the agencies of Christianity were merely human, or if they were nothing more than a system of deliberately adjusted imposture, how comes it to pass that there was so little in the apparent process to account for the effect produced? If all was of man, how did it happen that he constructed a scheme in the very teeth of human prejudice? and, more than this, how did it happen that a scheme so constructed

obtained a footing among mankind? Was it so easy a thing to subvert Jewish prejudice, in the very city of Jerusalem, and to silence the oracles of heathenism where they had ruled with despotic sway, that twelve fishermen, just quitting their nets, and determining to become the founders of a new religion, should be deemed equal to the task? Let such a case be imagined to take place in our own age and nation. For if Christianity be not from heaven, nothing forbids the success of such another experiment on the credulity of mankind now any more than formerly. But does any one in his sober senses believe that it would succeed, or that it would produce even any considerable impression? We have had, it is true, occasional excitement produced by certain extravagant persons, but their partial success has mainly depended upon their appeal to the general data of Christianity, and upon their professed adherence to its cardinal doctrines. We might challenge all the philosophers who ever lived to invent or to propagate any imposture answering to the character of Christianity. The thing is impossible. Its facts

and its success are solitary examples in the history of our world. Paganism and the religion of the False Prophet have nothing in common with them.* The former accumulated its materials by a progressive departure from all right notions of the moral character of God, and by its marked coincidence with every thing base and polluted in human nature;—and the latter was propagated at the edge of the sword, and

* “No religion, purely as a religion,” observes Dr. Wilson, the present Bishop of Calcutta, “was ever propagated but the Christian. Heathenism was never a matter of dissemination or conversion. It had no creed, no origin distinct from the corrupt traces of a remote fabulous antiquity. It was a creature of human mould, contrived for the sake of human legislation. The Greeks and Romans imposed it not on their subject nations: Mahomedanism was the triumph of the sword. Conquest, not religious faith, was its manifest object; rapine, violence, and bloodshed were its credentials.

“No religion was ever attempted to be spread through the world by the means of instruction and persuasion, with an authority of its own, but Christianity. The idea never came into the mind of man to propagate a religion having for its set design and exclusive object the enlightening of mankind with a doctrine professedly divine, till Christianity said to her disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.”—See “The Evidences of Christianity stated, &c. &c.,” in two vols. 12mo. Second edition, pp. 259, 260.

amidst all those promises of sensual indulgence which are so grateful to a nature prone to the love of sin. But Christianity stood forth in the spotless purity of its divine Author, and refused to own any as its true disciples who remained under the dominion of their crimes. It assailed men with none of the weapons of human power, but made its triumphant appeal to the understanding and the heart. It boasted of no earthly patronage; but went forth in a secret and hidden power, which was "mighty to the pulling down of strong holds." All weakness in its exterior agencies, it became "the wisdom of God, and the power of God to the salvation" of thousands and tens of thousands who embraced its merciful provisions. It changed the very face of society, and effected revolutions in the manners, customs, and laws of mankind, which all other systems had failed to achieve. It is unphilosophical in the highest degree to trace its early prevalence to the mere influence of ordinary and secondary causes. There is no problem of the world's history bearing the least resemblance to it. The experience of

mankind supplies no illustration of any thing like the successes of Christianity springing from mere human instrumentality, whether well or ill directed. Must men then acknowledge a miracle in their zeal to get rid of a miraculous history? This is indeed very preposterous; but it is nevertheless the condition to which those reduce themselves who would attempt to account for the mighty revolution produced by Christianity upon mere natural principles. They discard the doctrine of miracles, they repudiate the testimony by which the miraculous facts of the Gospel are handed down to mankind; but they call upon their disciples to believe, without a tittle of evidence, that the fishermen of Galilee could have done all that they did, and that Christianity could have gained all its conquests, without the slightest aid from heaven,—nay, though imposture and deception were written on the entire undertaking. We demand of them an illustrative example, and we are sure that they cannot produce it. In the absence, then, of all experience to guide our course, and in opposition to all enlightened

calculations of what human agency can effect, in certain given instances, we are called upon by infidels to believe that the early successes of Christianity might be traced to the operation of secondary causes.* To the mind of any unprejudiced person, this will present all the startling difficulty of a miracle, without any of that credible testimony by which alone a miracle can be shewn to have taken place.

It is nothing short of an insult offered to my understanding, first to point me to the great moral and intellectual revolution which was produced by Christianity, within a very short period

* The reader will perceive that the author has not taken any distinct notice of Gibbon's attempt to trace the success of Christianity to the influence of second causes. The reason is simply this, that he deemed it better to pursue the argument without encumbering it by any specific reference to the special pleadings and inconclusive reasonings of that great but unhappy man. The objections, however, have been met, though they have not been alluded to; and, indeed, it is matter of just surprise that arguments so weak and futile should have ever been raised to the notoriety of a grave refutation. Those who wish to see this sceptical philosopher exhibited in his proper light, are recommended to read the Rev. A. Reed's discourse on "The Evidence of Revelation derived from the success of the Gospel." See Note, p. 197.

of the death of its founder, and then to assign as its sole cause, the zeal, energy, and talent of the fishermen of Galilee ; and the credulity, love of novelty, and versatility which obtain among mankind.

Upon every sceptical theory, the early triumphs of the gospel are not only unaccounted for, but totally unaccountable. Such a change was never wrought by mere human means. The entire experience of the race, and all the great facts of history, combine to shew the utter irrationality of supposing that a few obscure fishermen and mechanics could have baffled all the wisdom of the wise, brought to nothing the counsel of the prudent, and levelled in the dust the mightiest fabrics of superstition and vice.

But when we admit the doctrine of a supernatural influence, according to the distinct announcements of Christianity itself, we are reminded of a cause adequate to produce the effects witnessed. Then we wonder not that the weakest instruments should prevail, that disaster should lead to triumph, and that the blood of the martyrs should be the seed of the

church. If the mighty power of God was with the apostles, no wonder that thousands and tens of thousands should become obedient to their message. If the quickening energy of the living Spirit was seen, on the one hand, in external signs and wonders, rendering all gainsayers inexcusable; and, on the other, in inward, powerful, and all-subduing movements of the heart and conscience, what wonder was it if the congregated multitudes of Pentecoste trembled, repented, and turned to God; and if the Pagan world responded to the mighty and gracious impulse? By the nature of the facts to be accounted for, then, no less than by the actual data of Christianity, are we driven to the conclusion, that there was an interior and hidden but all controlling power, which accompanied and rendered effectual the first propagation of Christianity, which has watched over it from age to age, and which occasions all its success and all its blessed influence in the day in which we live. I conclude this branch of evidence in the language of an eloquent living author:—"Here is a religious

system, denominated Christian, which enters the world at a most inauspicious period, supposing it to be an imposture. It has not one principle in common with the religions which then prevailed. It is attempted to be propagated by a few persons who are signally disqualified for the undertaking, and are hated of all nations. It is opposed, from the very first, by Jew and Gentile, and chiefly by those who had most power and influence in their hands. Moreover, this religion is hostile to human opinion, human prejudice, human interest, human nature; and this is apparent from the admitted nature of man and the avowed principles of the gospel, as well as from the facts, that when men have been induced to adopt the Christian name, they have remained at enmity to the Christian faith, and that there has been, in every age, a predominant disposition to misunderstand and misrepresent, to pervert and degrade it. Yet has this religion been propagated over the earth with a facility altogether unparalleled by any art or science. Yet has it found a place for itself in many a

mind and country, to which the simplest mathematical demonstrations are at this moment unsolved problems.

“What is the conclusion? It is—it must be this—that the religion of Christ could not have been propagated by any *earthly power*—that it could not have been propagated by any *mere external agency* of Providence—that it could have been propagated *only* by a *spiritual* and *supernatural* influence addressed to the perceptions and affections of men,—and therefore that the religion of Christ is DIVINE, and its propagation through all ages is a DISTINCT, INDEPENDENT, and SPEAKING EVIDENCE of its DIVINITY.”*

5. *The Evidence derived from a survey of the moral and social benefits conferred on mankind by Christianity.*

This branch of evidence may be treated, like the preceding one, as a question simply of fact.

* See a Discourse by the Rev. A Reed, on “The Evidence of Revelation derived from the success of the Gospel,” in a Volume entitled “Lectures on some of the Principal Evidences of Revelation, delivered at the Monthly Meetings, &c.,” pp. 225, 226.

For if it can be shewn that Christianity has done more than all other causes combined to augment the resources of man's present enjoyment; if it can be shewn that it has heightened, to an almost inconceivable degree, all the social virtues; if it can be shewn that human nature has risen to an unheard-of elevation under its benign auspices, it will follow, as by irresistible consequence, after all the fruitless experiments of Greece and Rome, that it owes its origin to the Fountain of all wisdom and benevolence.

It is a fact, then, that "the world by wisdom" never reformed itself. For the space of four thousand years effort after effort was made, but without avail, to reduce mankind to some standard of obedience, and to rescue them from the dominion of selfishness and crime. This process of renovation was attempted in the fairest portions of the globe, and amidst all the advantages of the highest intellectual cultivation. It was tried in the heart of Europe and Asia, when philosophy and arts had reached their greatest eminence, and when the human mind had been nurtured in the schools to prodigious greatness.

In a thousand forms the task of bettering man's moral condition had been tried, but without even the shadow of success. Many of the precepts, indeed, of the heathen philosophers were good; but the motives urged by them were sometimes absurd, often vicious, and always powerless upon the great mass of the people. Their own standard of morals, in not a few instances, was glaringly defective; and as it respected the community at large, the theories of the schools did not so much as reach even the outward ear.

In all their pomp and magnificence, when poetry, and painting, and statuary, and arms, and empire had reached the very zenith of their glory, Greece and Rome were as little purged from crime and moral degradation as were the savage hordes of the north, who, in wild fury, broke in upon the empress of the world's destiny. The extreme of refinement, and the extreme of moral turpitude, met on the same theatre, and in the same actors. A base and monstrous idolatry everywhere prevailed, and everywhere associated itself with crimes which are reserved in Christian countries for the worst of men, and for

the most hidden recesses of the basest and most degraded of mankind. "It is a shame even to speak of those things which were done of them in secret." The very temples of the gods were the dwelling-places of sin. There virgin innocence was sacrificed at the shrine of the most scandalous lusts; there human victims were immolated upon the blood-stained altars of a vile and unmeaning idolatry; and there every species of impurity and heartless cruelty received the sanction of a priesthood whose hands reeked with blood, and whose hearts were steeped in impenitence and covetous desire.

It is a fact, too, that all other nations have shewn the same propensities, and have been distinguished by the same moral habits as Greece and Rome. It might have been supposed, indeed, that they would have been much more vicious; and that in proportion as they receded from the schools of philosophy, and from the sphere of the arts, they would put on a hue of pollution far deeper and more hideous. This, however, is by no means the case. The crimes of classic antiquity have never been exceeded

in the African hoard, or in the Polynesian wild. Idolatry, human sacrifice, polygamy, female degradation, have everywhere abounded in heathen lands; while there stands not upon the record of this world's history one solitary instance of a nation rising, by its own energy, from the worship of false gods, or from the moral debasement and crimes which it uniformly involves.

It is a fact, too, that Christianity did operate, and still continues to operate, a wondrous change upon the state of society. This change it produced, at first, by means the most unlikely. By preaching salvation through the cross of Christ, the first heralds of Messiah's kingdom, though individuals comparatively obscure, brought about a revolution of public opinion and of outward manners such as had never been the result of any preceding attempt to enlighten and to purify mankind. In all the heathen provinces of the Roman empire, and in the very capital itself, idolatry was everywhere laid aside or proscribed. The oracles of paganism were silenced by the living oracles of God; and the horrid practices of the temples and the groves were exchanged for

the decent solemnities of Christian worship, and for the sober and virtuous habits of Christian citizens. At Athens, and Corinth, and Ephesus, and, indeed, all the chief cities of heathen antiquity, the doctrine of Christ was the instrument of changing and remodelling the whole framework of society. Wherever it reached, it meliorated human life; and wherever it was actually embraced, it ennobled and purified individual character. The limits of Christianity have been, from its first propagation to the present moment, the boundary wall beyond which idolatry has not dared, in its direct forms, to pass. It has raised the standard of public morals above the most favoured models of pagan antiquity, not excepting those even of the far-famed kingdoms of Sparta and Syracuse. Where Christianity has waved her triumphant banner, she has given birth to a state of things altogether new. The worship of dumb idols* in every palpable shape,

* The idolatry of the Church of Rome, though practised under the Christian name, is of common origin with that of the Pantheon, and can be no less hateful in the sight of God.

she has utterly abolished ; the cruel and bloody rites which were practised for ages and generations under the auspices of the gods of heathenism, have been laid aside at her enlightened and benevolent call ; the shameless, and even murderous, sports of the Coliseum she has frowned into total annihilation ; the destruction of slaves and of female children finds no sanction where her voice of mercy is distinctly heard ; the depreciation of the rights which belong to woman is no where countenanced beneath the mild sway of the gospel ; the abominations of polygamy and capricious divorce are but little felt in any Christian state ; the vassalage of domestic slavery has ceased to foster tyranny on the one hand, and ignoble baseness on the other ;* the

* In ancient Attica there were 450,000 inhabitants, out of which population, only 40,000 are said to have been free. It is a dreadful blot upon the character of this country, that still she permits *eight hundred thousand* British subjects to be bought and sold, in the Colonies, at the will of their masters. Christians should combine, as such, and seek the immediate removal from the land of this crying sin. Alas ! that any of the American states should be found, to this day, engaged in the slave traffic ! Surely the word *liberty* must freeze upon the tongues of such Americans, and surely Christianity itself can be known among them only as a name !

direful practice of private assassination,* by the dagger or by the poisoned bowl, finds no advocates in countries upon which the religion of Christ has exerted its beneficial tendency; the horrors of war, great as they must ever be, are mitigated in a tenfold degree under the generous dictation of the gospel; the poor, the aged, and the afflicted are treated with a degree of consideration in Christian countries altogether unknown in pagan lands; and all the rights of property and of personal safety are guaranteed, with a degree of precision, in nations blessed with the light of revealed truth, to which Rome, in all the glory of empire, never attained.

All this is matter of fact, which no one who wishes his understanding to be respected will venture for a moment to deny. So palpably, indeed, is it such, that the traveller, blind-folded,

* It was no uncommon thing for a Roman Prætor to convict, in one short season, in Italy, *three or four thousand* individuals for the crime of private assassination; and among these, husbands were often condemned for the secret murder of their wives in order to obtain their dowry; and wives for the murder of their husbands in order to secure a union to the miscreants who had seduced them from the paths of virtue.

may be able to tell when he passes from Christian territories into pagan lands. The heathen world was one vast theatre of crime, relieved, indeed, by here and there some heroic example of virtuous conduct, but sunk as a whole into the abyss of moral putridity and vice. But when Christianity arose in the east, like some bright and glorious luminary, it dispelled the darkness of the pagan world, and, in little more than two centuries from the time of its first publication, it shivered to atoms the whole system of idol worship, reconstructed the entire fabric of society, introduced new maxims of government and of personal conduct, changed the manners and habits of mankind, drove vice from its ancient lurking places, shut the temples of the gods, abolished the sacrifices of an idolatrous priesthood, and made the hopes and fears of immortality the governing principles of thousands and tens of thousands of the human race.

Whence, then, sprung the power of a triumph so great, so speedy, and so benignant?—a triumph which proclaimed peace on earth, and

good will to men,—a triumph bloodless and serene,—a triumph which delivered such a large portion of the human race from the vassalage of the most cruel and abominable idolatries,—a triumph which issued in a melioration in all the social relations of man which the wisdom of this world could never produce? Whence, I ask, sprung the power of such a triumph? Not from man assuredly; for it was unlike all the other manifestations of his mental character; and it was followed by such benign and holy results that it stood solitary and alone upon the page of this world's history. Nor was there any thing whatever in its origin to indicate the wisdom of man. Had man constructed a scheme of moral renovation it would have been introduced to the notice of his fellow-creatures in a way very different from that in which Christianity began its auspicious career. Let two considerations then fully possess the mind, and it will be impossible to resist the conclusion, that Christianity is from heaven. In the *first place*, recollect that of all agencies that could be contemplated, the first heralds of the cross were the

least likely to succeed in the proposed undertaking of converting the world; and, in the *second place*, bear in mind, as a matter of fact, that in spite of prejudice, in spite of a huge system of idolatry, in spite of all interest and power and terror, they did succeed in such manner as never before had been known; and in doing so, changed the whole face of society, purified all the springs of human action, established the reign of peace and happiness, drove idolatry from the high places of the earth, and, to the full extent of their triumph, paved the way for the realization of another paradise.

. The power which scattered so much darkness, and which spread so much light; which wrought a change on mankind so pure and beneficial; which diffused such a mass of happiness, and checked such a mighty current of misery; which, like an electric shock, blasted and withered all the ancient fabrics of idolatry, and on their ruins erected a system of doctrine and a form of worship which promised and yielded peace and joy and happiness to all the dwellers upon earth,—such a power as this could only have

emanated from that throne from which issued originally the high behests of creation.

And, O ! if a triumph which can yet only be regarded as partial affords such intimation of the benevolent interposition of the Infinite Mind, what an evidence of the divine origin of Christianity will be supplied to mankind when its moral transformations are complete, when all nations are subjected to its righteous sway, when its disciples shall drink more deeply into its pure and benignant spirit, when that blessed influence which is now partial shall be universal, and when the church of the living God, vocal with his praise, shall reflect with sweetest lustre the radiance of his moral image.

Great as were the first triumphs of the gospel, there can be no doubt but that greater triumphs yet await its peaceful heralds. In the morning of its strength it subdued the Roman empire, and stood confessed the prevailing religion of the civilized world ; but the time is fast approaching when it shall be proclaimed the religion of the whole earth, and when the mighty changes it shall work in the opinions, manners, and hopes

of mankind, shall compel the most thoughtless of a rebellious race to exclaim—"this is the finger of God!" Then when "the people shall be all righteous," and when the Spirit of God shall be "poured out upon all flesh," shall it be seen that Christianity is the balm of bleeding hearts, the parent of peace and good will, and the angel of God's mercy to heal all the miseries and vices of an apostate race.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRANSMISSION OF THE SACRED BOOKS.

THOUGH Christianity be a divine religion, it may be possible, in the lapse of ages, that the record which discloses its leading doctrines and facts has undergone some serious mutilation. Is this or is it not the case? This is an important inquiry, and it admits of an easy and satisfactory reply—a reply which must carry conviction to every candid mind as to the genuineness, authenticity, and incorruptness of the Sacred Books.

That they were written by the men whose names they bear is a thing quite as well established as that the *Æneid* was composed by Virgil, the *Iliad* by Homer, and the *Cyropædia* by Xenophon. The very *literary* character of the Old and New Testament Scriptures would go far to prove that they are genuine productions. They exhibit a diversity of style, which shews that they were written by various authors, and they display an idiomatic peculiarity correspond-

ing to the ages and circumstances in which they were written. Thus, in the Pentateuch we meet with a slight mixture of Egyptian words, as might be expected if Moses was the writer; while in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, there is a considerable infusion of Chaldee and Persian, connecting them beyond all reasonable doubt with a period in Jewish history subsequent to the Babylonish captivity. If, moreover, we turn to the New Testament, we find its several parts written in a species of Greek partaking largely of Hebrew, Chaldee, Syriac, and Latin words and phrases,—a circumstance exactly answering to all that might have been anticipated upon the supposition that men in the precise condition of the Evangelists and Apostles had furnished their contents.

Nor is it within the range of probability to imagine for a moment that the sacred books are forgeries. If they are, then they must have been palmed upon the world by persons whose imposture could not be detected. But how could this occur in the matter of giving currency to the records of a public faith? Take, for instance,

the Books of the Old Testament Scriptures. If they are not genuine productions, I ask who were the parties concerned in the iniquitous forgery? It could not be the men of heathen antiquity, for they were imperfectly acquainted with the national peculiarities and rites of the Hebrews; and were not likely, moreover, to stamp the seal of their approbation upon records which accredited the posterity of Abraham as God's peculiar people, and condemned the whole Gentile world as sunk in a state of idolatry and crime. It could not be the followers of Christ, for it is matter of undoubted historical certainty that the Scriptures of the Jews existed many centuries before the Christian name was ever heard of. It could not be the Jews themselves, for never was there a more uncompromising exposure of the crimes, idolatries, and righteous chastisements of a rebellious and guilty nation than that which they contain.

If we look at the New Testament, it is equally unreasonable to suppose that it is not a genuine production, and that it was not actually written by the men to whom it is attributed. Unbe-

believing Jews and Gentiles were happily, in this instance, the guardians of revelation; for as they were equally opposed to the doctrine of Him whom they had combined to crucify, and as they were both zealous in persecuting all who ranked themselves as his humble and devoted followers, it stands to reason, that if the records of the Christian faith had not been genuine narratives of facts, furnished by the very men who assume to be the writers, the dishonest effort would have been detected and exposed, and the whole world, and all succeeding generations, would have been warned against the iniquitous attempt to originate a history not founded in fact.

The genuineness of the Books of Scripture was never called in question by friends or enemies. From the earliest periods of the Jewish history downwards, the Hebrews regarded their sacred Books as their peculiar treasure, and associated them all with their several authors and ages; and, in like manner, the Christians, from the apostolic age to the present moment, have had a regular succession of writers, who have

quoted and authenticated, in various ways, the Books which compose the New Testament canon. It is an interesting fact that Celsus, and Porphyry, and Julian, and an endless race of heretics, combine with the apostolic and Christian fathers, Barnabas, Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, and Eusebius, in accrediting the Books of Scripture as genuine productions. The most inveterate opponents of revelation have been compelled to admit the fact that the Bible is no forgery.

Nor is there the slightest reason to suspect that the Scriptures have undergone any material alteration, or that they are not now in the same condition in which they were when they came from Moses and the prophets, the evangelists and apostles. To say that the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible, or that the ancient versions and translations, had not been deviated from in a single particular, would be to assume a position too lofty. In the process of transcribing some thousands of copies, before the art of printing was discovered, letters and syllables, and even words, without the intervention

of a miracle, must have been left out. But that there has been any serious or fraudulent omission or interpolation, or that any one doctrine has been added or subtracted, cannot be shewn by any enemy of revelation, and need not be apprehended by any humble-minded or unlettered Christian..

As it respects the Old Testament Scriptures, it is a well-established fact that the Jews were their faithful guardians. They were often employed, indeed, in the act of transcribing them, but so strict were they in comparing the copies with the originals, that they numbered both the words and letters. That the Jews never altered their Sacred Books is triumphantly proved by the fact that neither their own prophets nor Jesus Christ, though they laid many a heavy charge at their door, ever once intimated that they were guilty of such mutilation. The Great Teacher, indeed, told them, with the utmost fidelity, that they had made void "The commandment of God by their traditions,"* but he never insinuates

* Matt. xv. 6.

that they had corrupted the Sacred Books. "It is one of the wonders of providence, that God, for the preservation of these books, should make use of that scrupulous, and I might say, almost superstitious, care that was among those Jews whose office it was to keep the Books of the Old Testament."* Among the *one thousand one*

* See John How's Lectures on the oracles of God. Works, one Vol. Imperial Octavo, *just published*, p. 1075. The whole passage referred to is as follows: "It was known they used to count all the letters of the Old Testament, that they might be sure never to miss a letter. Again, in transcribing copies, (which was frequent,) every copy was always examined by an appointed number of their wise men, as they termed them. Further, if any copy should have been found, upon examination, to have four or five faults in it, in one copy of the whole Old Testament, that book was presently adjudged to be buried in the grave of one or other of their wise men. And, lastly, for those books that, upon examination, were found to be punctually true, it was very plain from the history of those times, that there was the greatest reverence paid to them imaginable. They never used to touch those perfect copies (taking them into their hands) without kissing them solemnly, nor to lay them down again without solemn kissing of them. They were never used to sit upon the place where one of those books was wont to be laid. If one of them by casualty fell to the ground, they appointed a solemn fast to be kept for it, as an ill-boding thing, that such a thing should happen. So that it is most plain that these keepers of the Books of the Old Testament could never have it in design to corrupt any of them; but it was

Hundred and fifty manuscripts and versions of the Old Testament which are still extant, there is an essential agreement, an agreement most wonderful and striking, shewing, beyond all

that which they did abhor above all things. And it was a principle (as Philo tells us, and Josephus much to the same purpose) instilled into the youth of that nation, and even those of the best quality, that they should run the utmost hazard, and incur a thousand deaths, rather than they should suffer any alteration or diminution of those books, or that any of them should be lost in any other way. And then, besides all this scrupulous care of the keepers of the books of the Old Testament (with which a design of corrupting would no way consist), we may add, that the thing itself was afterward impossible. If they would before, when it was in their own hands, they could; but afterwards, if they would, they could not; because that in Christ and his apostles' days, a great number of them were converted to the Christian faith, who knew all the Books of the Old Testament as well as themselves. Therefore, it was impossible now for the infidel Jews, those that were not converted, to make any alteration but it must be presently spied and exclaimed against; therefore it was a vain thing for any to attempt it, after so many were converted to the Christian religion. And thereupon we may further add, that the testimonies that were contained in these books against themselves, and with which contained in them they are transmitted to us, do shew that they never went about to corrupt them. The many testimonies against idolatry contained in these books, whereby their forefathers from age to age, for many ages, were witnessed against, would have induced them to expunge all things that were therein contained against idolatry (so tender were they of their repu-

conjecture or doubt, the uncorrupted preservation of these precious records.

Nor is the protection less manifest which has been spread over the books of the New Testament.

tation), if there had not been a great awe upon their minds never to attempt the corrupting or the alteration of any thing in those books. The wickedness of their forefathers was, in these books, so highly remonstrated against, in respect of the testimonies they so often gave against their idolatry, and yet these books we find in their own hands, with these testimonies in them, against the Jews and their forefathers, for many foregoing ages, through sundry times and divers intervals, though we do not find after the second temple that people relapsed into that crime. And then there is the fullest testimony against their infidelity in these books that can be. Who would not wonder that these books should come out of the hands of the Jews, with these testimonies, in the great controversy between the Christians and them? that is, of Christ being the Messiah, in which you have so punctual assertions against them that nothing can be more. Those many testimonies that do concern the Messiah, particularly that famous prophecy, that the sceptre should not depart from Judah till Shilo should come, and those numerous presages in many of the latter prophets, (Isaiah especially, and sundry others,) make it one of the greatest wonders of Providence that such a book should come, with these things in it, out of men's hands, against whom they are a continual remonstrance. But, however, this proves that they did never design any alteration; either they saw it impossible for one while, and before that, they had no inclination or inducement that would be prevailing with them to go about it, that is, that there should be an alteration with design."

The early multiplication of copies, together with the several translations into foreign tongues, rendered any serious deviation from the original manuscripts utterly impossible. Besides, in the course of one century from the period of Christ's resurrection, the gospel was spread over the greater part of the Lesser Asia, and over many portions of Africa and Europe; so that if any of the early Christians, in any particular district of the world, had attempted to alter or mutilate the sacred books, it would have been impossible that they should have escaped detection among the many disciples of Christ spread over other sections of the globe.

The early heresies, too, which sprung up among the professed followers of Jesus, rendered the corruption of the sacred books next to an impossibility. "That passage of the apostle," observes the immortal Howe, "is not greatly enough pondered according to the weightiness of the expression, that *there must be heresies*. This great use that hath been of the divisions in Christian churches is not, it may be, considered as it should be by many. But nothing can carry

a clearer evidence and demonstration with it than that, because of those divisions, any depravation of the said records (that is, any material, general, successful, continued depravation) is altogether impossible; because the one party would be continually declaiming and crying out against the other; and then how would it be espied?"*

Indeed it may be safely affirmed, that the Christians were never charged by their bitterest enemies with the crime of mutilating their Scriptures, and that these sacred records have suffered less from transcribers, copyists, and translators, than any other documents of a remote antiquity.

"It is true, that in translations, persons have laboured to serve their own purposes, by translating this way and that, as they thought fit. But for alteration of copies, that is what never entered into the mind of any body to attempt; which is a thing so easily spied out, that nothing is more so; and so must needs blast and dis sever the cause and interest of that party it was de-

* Howe's Work, in one vol., p. 1076.

signed to serve, and therefore could never be. And the impossibility of any such alteration it is easy for any man that useth his understanding to apprehend from a similar instance. And thus, do but take any one people that are under the same government, and that have their laws, by which they are governed, digested into some system or other; as, for instance, our statute book; why, suppose very ill-minded men in the nation should have a design to corrupt and alter the statute book, every one would see it to be impossible. Which way would they go to work to impose a false statute book upon a nation, wherein every man's right and property is concerned? And if any such should have such a design, they would soon give it up, as finding it impossible, and a thing not to be done, and therefore a vain thing to attempt. But the difficulty is a thousand times greater of making designed alteration of those sacred books and records that are spread so unspeakably further than a nation, and wherein the concerns of all that have them in their hands are recorded, not temporal only, but eternal. Here is their all

for eternity, another world ! So that it must be altogether impossible that there could have been such a thing effected ; and therefore it is the most unlikely thing that such a matter should ever be attempted. And then, I say, if there be that plain evidence, that for that reason these books must be the same, that they cannot have been altered with design, and consequently not materially, then it were the most unreasonable thing in all the world to expect that God could confirm it to us otherwise than he hath done, or that the nature of the thing doth admit of it ; because, otherwise, there must have been miracles wrought for every one to see and take notice of, nay, that would altogether loose the usefulness and significancy of miracles themselves, because it would make miracles so common in such a case. If every man must have a miracle to prove to him this is God's word, it would take off that particular thing for which they are only significant with men, that is, because they are rare and extraordinary things, and then they would cease to be so. It might as well be expected that every man should have a Bible

reached him down by an invisible hand from heaven, as that there should be a miracle wrought to prove to him that this was the same book that was so and so confirmed and sealed in our Saviour's and his apostles' time. And therefore I reckon that, upon the grounds that have been laid, it is very plain both that these books that were extant under the name of Scriptures in our Saviour's and his apostles' time, were of divine authority, and that the books that we now have in our hands are the same with those books, and therefore are of divine authority."*

It is, then, a most animating consideration, that, by a variety of striking providences, it hath pleased Almighty God to preserve to us unmutilated and uncorrupted the very records which the first Christians held to be divine, and upon the doctrines and principles of which they were ready, in the midst of the greatest dangers, to repose their eternal all. It is highly consolatory to those who have but little time and few advantages for research to be informed, upon the most indubi-

* Howe's Work, p. 1076.

table evidence, that in their English Bibles they have the same precious document which was read in the first assemblies of the Christian church; and that, in the multiplication of manuscripts and translations, no serious or important alteration has been introduced into the sacred text. For this fact let the humble and devout Christian bless God; and, in the contemplation of it, let the rejecter of Revelation pause and tremble; lest peradventure he should be found fighting against God.

Let this chapter be fairly weighed in connexion with what has been previously advanced on the subject of the evidences of our holy faith, and let him who still doubts say within himself,—“Wherefore do I doubt?” To such a solemn interrogatory, conscience may perhaps supply the ready and faithful response,—“How can you but doubt, while sin is blinding your perceptions, and hardening your heart?”

CHAPTER V.

ON THE INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

HAVING glanced at the evidence which supports the conclusion that the Bible is a Revelation from God, and having, moreover, ascertained that the books of Scripture have been transmitted to us in a pure and unadulterated form; it may now be proper to inquire into the true nature of inspiration, and to endeavour to determine to what extent the sacred volume is entitled to the high and distinctive appellation of—"THE WORD OF GOD."

The importance of this question is very great, for upon its answer must depend the degree of deference which is due to the Scriptures as an authoritative communication from Heaven. It is a question which cannot be decided, I presume, by any arguments *a priori*, but by a direct appeal to the testimony of the infallible word. The real nature of inspiration, as belonging to the writers of Scripture, is a doctrine purely of

Revelation; and the only duty of a sincere inquirer in reference to it must be simply this, to ascertain for himself what is predicated or announced concerning it in the word of God.

With this conviction on my mind, I shall not trouble my readers with any lengthened details of what others have advanced on the subject of inspiration, but shall come almost immediately to the point in hand, viz., *the doctrine of Scripture, as to the manner in which it was imparted.*

I must just be allowed, however, to premise, that writers of the Socinian creed have so relaxed their notions of inspiration as to talk even of the inconclusive reasonings of apostles; and that others, not of this pernicious creed, have spoken and written about *degrees* and *kinds* of inspiration until they have inadvertently weakened, on their own minds, and on the minds of others, the authority of God in the Scriptures. I would have all such writers remember, that these modified views of inspiration are of modern date, and that for full sixteen hundred years they were unknown in the church of Christ.

“Many considerable writers on the evidences

of Christianity, of late, have satisfied themselves with proving its divine authority generally, but have tacitly, and most inconsistently, given up or denied the infallibility of the books in which it is recorded. They speak of authenticity, veracity, credibility; but not inspiration. Some have limited the assistance of the Spirit to the prophetical parts. Others have extended it to the doctrinal, but excluded the historical. Whilst many have lowered the whole notion of inspiration to a mere aid occasionally afforded to the sacred penmen. Thus the impression left on the minds of their readers has been, that the Bible is authentic indeed, and credible, and contains a revelation from God; but that it was indited by good and pious men only, with little more of accuracy than would belong to them as faithful historians. An intermixture of human infirmity and error is thus by no means excluded; and the Scriptures are considered as the work of fallible writers, doing their best, and entitled in all their main statements to full belief, but not under that immediate and plenary influence of the Holy Spirit, which renders all

they say concerning religion, the unerring word of God."*

Most ruinous to the souls of men must be such views of the blessed word of God, and most derogatory are they to that Spirit, who has not given so much as a shadow of countenance, in the sacred books, to such vague and sceptical notions. We ought to be jealous, not only of such latitudinarian views of inspiration, but also of every approach to them. For my own part, after much deliberation, and I trust careful and unprejudiced examination of the arguments of opponents, I have come to the conclusion, not only that the ideas contained in scripture were conveyed by the Spirit to the minds of inspired men, but that they were supernaturally guided in their diction and in their writings. I shall not, however, bring this theory to the word of God, to seek countenance for it there; but shall rather call the attention of my readers to the word of God itself, that they may thence gather the true notion of inspiration.

* See Bishop Wilson's Lectures on "The Evidences," &c., 12mo, vol. i. p. 314.

I begin, then, with that part of scripture which was included in the Jewish canon; and which is known by the name of the Old Testament. And if it can be shewn that the infallible Teacher, whose divine mission has already been clearly established, fully accredits the divine authority, and the infallible character of that document, considered as a whole, and without a single recognised exception, an important step will have been gained towards ascertaining the perfection of the Jewish canon, and also the real nature and extent of inspiration.

At an early stage in his public ministry the Messiah announced, to an immense assembly of his countrymen, his views and determinations respecting their ancient Scriptures—"Think not," said he, "that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."* Every attentive reader of the New

* Matt. v. 17; 18.

Testament must have discovered that the phrase "the law and the prophets" denotes the sacred books of the Jews; and every unprejudiced reader must perceive that the Saviour in this declaration recognises them as an infallible standard, by which he was willing that his own pretensions should be rigidly tried.

On another occasion he charges those who reject him with not having the word of God abiding in them, because they believed not in him whom God the Father had sent to them; and then he immediately adds—"Search the Scriptures; for in them ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me."* Here are several things to be noticed. In the first place, the Scriptures of the Jews, which did not abide in them through their unbelief, are distinctly recognised as *the word of God*. In the

* John v. 38, 39, 45.

second place, they are appealed to as a testimony from God concerning Christ, rendering all those Jews inexcusable who rejected him. And, in the third place, they are spoken of emphatically as *the writings*, evidently including them all, and leaving no room to dispute the divine origin of their diction any more than the doctrines they contained.

On many occasions, Jesus spake of the sacred books of the Jews as divinely authoritative writings. "He that believeth on me, as the *Scripture* hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."* "If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the *Scripture* cannot be broken; say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God."† "Jesus saith unto them, did ye never read in the *Scriptures*, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the

* John vii. 38.

† John x. 35, 36.

Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?"* "Jesus answered and said unto them, ye do err, not knowing *the Scriptures*."† "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall *the Scriptures* be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"‡ "I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but *the Scripture* must be fulfilled."§ Now what are we to gather from this species of reference? Why, two things—*first*, that there is not the shadow of a doubt upon the inspiration of any part of a document to which the infallible Teacher made such implicit and authoritative allusion; and, *second*, that simply considered *as writings*, the books thus referred to are the product of God's immediate inspiration: Where is there any thing like a surmise that there is not as much authority in the *writings* as in the *thoughts* and *ideas* which they convey?

* Matt. xxi. 42.

† Matt. xxii. 29.

‡ Matt. xxvi. 53, 54.

§ Mark xiv. 49.

To the testimony of our Lord may be added that of his Apostles, who bore his commission, and who wrought stupendous miracles in his name. "All Scripture," said Paul to Timothy, "is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, &c."* Now, granting that the rendering of Grotius, "*all divinely inspired Scripture is even profitable, &c.*" is the correct one, it is perfectly clear that the context mainly, if not exclusively, restricts the Apostle's declaration to the Old Testament Scriptures,—those sacred writings which Timothy had known from his infancy. The whole Scripture, in the knowledge of which this young evangelist had been trained, is here said to be given by inspiration of God; that is, breathed by him into the minds of those holy men who were divinely and infallibly gifted to hand it forth to the church.

The Apostle Peter, when speaking of the office and end of prophecy, as "a light that shineth in a dark place," asserts, that "no prophecy of the

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* I cannot help thinking that an unprejudiced expositor would regard this as a distinct affirmation of the inspiration of the prophecies, both as it respects their matter and manner. As to their matter, they were not the result of any private impulse,† and as to their manner, “holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The prophets are also represented, by the same Apostle, as “searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified before-hand the sufferings

* 2 Pet. i. 20, 21.

† Dr. Doddridge's paraphrase is as follows:—“*Knowing this first, as a matter of chief importance, that no prophecy of Scripture is of private impulse,*” or original: “*For prophecy was not brought of old to the minds of those that uttered it by the will of man; they could not work themselves up to the attainment of this extraordinary gift, nor divinely forced what they themselves desired, and whenever they pleased; but holy men of God, whom he honoured with that important work, spake [as they were] borne on by the Holy Spirit; and they were only his organs in declaring to the people what he was disposed to suggest to them.*”

of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”* From this passage it is plain that the prophets did not always, nor even frequently, understand the import of their own predictions; from which it may be inferred, with indubitable certainty, that the words in which they were couched, no less than the thoughts which they contained, were imparted by the Spirit of God; for surely they could not have been trusted with the diction and verbiage of a communication which confessedly they did not understand.

It is upon this same principle, that we find the Old Testament Scriptures styled “the Oracles of God,”† and “the lively oracles;”‡ to indicate, doubtless, that they were given forth by God himself. Hence the following expressions—
 “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was *spoken of the Lord*, by the prophet.”§
 “How then doth David, *in spirit*, call him Lord?”|| “For David himself saith *by the Holy Ghost*.”¶ “As he *spake* by the mouth of his

* 1 Pet. i. 11.

† Acts vii. 38.

|| Matt. xxii. 43.

† Rom. iii. 2.

§ Matt. i. 22. ii. 15.

¶ Mark xii. 36.

holy prophets, which have been since the world began."* "Which the *Holy Ghost spake* by the mouth of David."† "He saith (that is God) also in another Psalm, thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."‡ "Well spake the *Holy Ghost*, by *Esaias* the prophet, unto our fathers."§ Wherefore, as the *Holy Ghost saith*, to-day if you will hear his voice."||

Now all this corresponds with what we find in the Old Testament Scriptures themselves. Take the case of Moses, the great prophet and lawgiver, of Israel, and the inspired author of the Pentateuch. When he was commanded to go to Pharaoh, and to lead forth the people of Israel, he entreated that he might be excused from the performance of a task for which he deemed himself so utterly unqualified. His sense of weakness was, in a high degree, proper; but his refusal to go, when God had assured him that he would be "with him," evinced great want of faith. God reproved him for his sinful

* Luke i. 70.

† Acts i. 16.

‡ Acts xiii. 35.

§ Acts xxviii. 25.

|| Heb. x. 15.

timidity, and said to him, "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? Now, therefore, go, *and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.*"*

The leader of Israel again repeats his difficulty, and again receives a similar reply. At last his scruples are overcome by the feeling of supernatural aid, and ever after his addresses to the chosen tribes are couched in terms indicative of their immediate divine origin—"Thus saith the Lord,"—"These are the words which the Lord hath commanded, that ye should do them." Had he not been conscious that the inspiration under which he wrote extended to his words as well as thoughts, would he have adopted the phraseology attributed to him in the following passages?—"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep these commandments of the Lord your God which I command you."† "And these words which I command

* Exod. iv. 11, 12.

† Deut. iv. 2.

thee this day shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children.”* “Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your head that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates.”†

In like manner all the prophets represent their entire communications as from God; they all address themselves to the people, “Thus saith the Lord,” and some of them, as in the case of Elijah to Ahab, personate the Deity, and utter his threatenings as if they were their own; “Behold I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity;”‡ this was the voice, indeed, of Elijah, but the speaker was God. Hence

* Deut. vi. 6.

† Deut. xi. 18.

‡ 1 Kings, xxi. 21.

the word of the Lord is said again and again to come to the prophets, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel says, "The spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue."*

It may, indeed, be said that, though in the prophetical and doctrinal parts of the Old Testament Scriptures the sacred writers were under the influence of a full and verbal inspiration, this could not be necessary in furnishing the historical parts of the word of God. Now, this is a distinction which is never once made, to the best of my recollection, in the inspired volume itself; and when the vast importance of the chronological and historical details of Scripture is taken into account, in the relations which they bear to the transcendent scheme of human redemption, I think it will be regarded as futile and dangerous. Upon the whole I am satisfied that there is no solid foundation for any theory of the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures which does not consider all their several parts as written under the immediate teaching of the Holy Ghost, both as to sentiment and diction.

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 2.

Nor is the complete inspiration of the apostles and writers of the New Testament less satisfactorily demonstrated than is that of Moses and the prophets. Such full inspiration they eminently needed, in order to the faithful execution of their responsible task. They were to be employed in raising up disciples to their risen Lord, and as the historians of his life and death; and as the authoritative counsellors of his church in all ages, they needed "an unction from the Holy One." We find accordingly that such unction and such infallible guidance as were necessary were distinctly promised to them. Twelve men were selected as the heralds of his kingdom, who enjoyed his familiar intercourse, and were in every way qualified for bearing witness to his doctrine, miracles, sufferings, death, and resurrection. "Go ye," said Christ to his chosen band, "and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, *lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*"*

* Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

When, during his own personal ministry, he sent them forth to visit the cities of Israel, he gave them this miraculous assurance, — “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak ; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.”* And when our blessed Lord was about to ascend up on high and to leave his apostles and disciples, he delivered to them the following animating promises :—“And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever ; even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him. But ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye

* Matt. x. 19, 20.

cannot hear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak; and he will shew you things to come." "Here," observes an eminent writer, "are all the degrees of inspiration which we have seen to be necessary for the apostles; the Spirit was to bring to their remembrance what they had heard; to guide them into the truth, which they were not then able to bear; and to shew them things to come; and all this they were to derive, not from occasional illapses, but from the perpetual inhabitation of the Spirit."*

Hence we find that the apostles laid claim to that inspiration which their divine Master had so distinctly promised. "We shall not find," as the above writer well observes, "that claim formally advanced in the gospels. This omission has sometimes been regarded by those superficial critics, whose prejudices seem to account for their

* See the Rev. Richard Watson's Theological Dictionary, under the article "Inspiration."

haste, as an objection against the existence of inspiration. But if you attend to the reason of the omission, you will perceive that it is only an instance of that delicate propriety which pervades all the New Testament. The gospels are the record of the great facts which vouch the truth of Christianity. These facts are to be received upon the testimony of men who had been eye-witnesses of them. The foundation of the Christian faith being laid in an assent to these facts, it would have been preposterous to have introduced in support of them that influence of the Spirit which preserved the minds of the apostles from error. For there can be no proof of the inspiration of the apostles unless the truth of the facts be previously admitted. The apostles, therefore, bring forward the evidence of Christianity in its natural order when they speak in the gospels as the companions and eye-witnesses of Jesus, claiming that credit which is due to honest men who had the best opportunities of knowing what they declared. This is the language of St. John—"Many other signs did Jesus in the presence of his disciples. But these are written that ye may believe;

and this is the disciple which testifieth these things."*

When the following circumstances, then, are taken into account, the absence of any formal announcement of inspiration in the gospels is no barrier in the way of admitting their full claim to this high distinction. In the *first place*, there was an assistance promised by our Lord, ere he left his disciples, which, from its very form, must have been partly at least intended to qualify his disciples for the task of recording the history of his earthly sojourn. By that assistance they were to have "all things whatsoever the Lord said to them brought to their remembrance;" they were to be conducted "into all truth;" they were to be shewn the "things to come;" and Christ was to be with them always.

In the *second place*, we find that no distinction whatever is made, by Christ, between the authority of those whom he accredited and his own. "He that heareth you, heareth me; and

* John xx. 30, 31. xxi. 24. See Watson's Theological Dictionary, on the article "Inspiration."

he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me."* This is language which equally accredits the gospel† and the epistles, and which renders it a high affront to the Son of God to cavil at any thing contained in the one or the other.

In the *third place*, we find the apostles placing their own communications on a level with those of prophets and inspired men of old. "That ye may be mindful," said the apostle Peter, "of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets; and of the commandments of us the

* Luke x. 16.

† It may be said, indeed, that Mark and Luke were not apostles, and that, therefore, the infallible assistance promised to such distinguished servants of the church did not belong to them. In reply to this, it may be stated, that early general tradition places Mark among those seventy disciples whom Christ sent out through the land of Israel with miraculous endowments and a promise of supernatural aid; and awards to his gospel a place among the canonical books of the New Testament;—and that Luke, who appears to have written his gospel first, (though several uninspired accounts of the history of Christ obtained before, Luke i. 1,) was the contemporary and intimate companion of Paul, (Col. iv. 14,) who, it is universally conceded, examined and approved his gospel, stamping it with apostolic authority, and thereby ushering it into the church of Christ with the full credentials of canonical and inspired scripture.

apostles of the Lord and Saviour."* Hence the language of the great apostle of the Gentiles :—
 "Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will' or
 "commandment of God:"† "Paul, an apostle,
 not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ,
 and God the Father, who raised him from the
 dead. I neither received the gospel of man,
 neither was I taught it but by the revelation of
 Jesus Christ. When it pleased God, who
 separated me from my mother's womb, and
 called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me,
 that I might preach him among the heathen;
 immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood,
 neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which
 were apostles before, but I went into Arabia."‡

In the most unequivocal forms that can be adopted, the apostles assert their inspiration in their epistolary correspondence. "Now," said Paul, "we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things which are freely given us of God, which things also we speak, not in the

* 2 Pet. iii. 2. † Eph. i. 1. 1 Tim. i. 1.

‡ Gal. i. 1, 12, 15—17. compared with Acts xxvi. 12—18.

words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth."* "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."† "For this cause, also, thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God."‡ "We are of God," said the apostle John; "he that knoweth God, heareth us: he that is not of God, heareth not us."§ And, speaking of the New Testament Church, Paul declares that it is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone."|| Such a form of expression must have been blasphemous in the extreme, if the writings and the authority of the apostles did not stand upon an equal footing with the writings and the authority of the prophets. In all the passages which demonstrate the inspiration of the word of

* 1 Cor. ii. 12, 13.

† 1 Cor. xiv. 37.

‡ 1 Thess. ii. 13.

§ 1 John iv. 6.

|| Eph. ii. 20.

God, there is not one, as far as I remember, that limits the divine afflatus to the sentiments conveyed; and, on the other hand, there are several texts which extend it, beyond all reasonable doubt, to the words which the speakers employ.* the conclusion I draw from this is, that the distinction between *mental* and *verbal* inspiration is altogether of man's devising, and that the only safe way of receiving the entire Scriptures is to regard both their sentiment and their language as "THE WORD OF GOD."

There may be difficulties to some minds in this view. But what view of truth is without difficulty? If we believe nothing till we get rid of all difficulty, we shall verily soon be in the condition of believing nothing.

Some have said, if inspiration be *plenary* and *verbal*, how can the difference of style among the

* Take all those parts of the Prophets and of the Pentateuch which begin with—"Thus saith the Lord;" and also such parts of the prophetic announcements as were unintelligible to the prophets themselves. Dan. xii. 7—9. In the New Testament, see also John xiv. 16, 17, 26. xvi. 12, 13. Luke xxi. 15. Matt. x. 19, 20. 1 Cor. ii. 13. 2 Pet. i. 21.

several writers of Scripture be accounted for? My reply is, that the Spirit of God was as capable of influencing the mind of a prophet or an apostle in coincidence with his own tastes, predilections, and education, as in opposition to them. If the inspiration is admitted at all, there need, therefore, be no doubt or perplexity here. I may just add, however, that though there is a striking variety in the diction of the inspired writers, there is, at the same time, an inexpressible peculiarity attaching to the books of Scripture at large, which distinguishes them from all apocryphal and uninspired productions in the several ages to which they belong. The *individuality* of the writers is indeed preserved; but the *individuality* of the divine agency is not less conspicuous. "Is it not evident," observes an eminent divine, "that God may exercise a perfect superintendency over inspired writers as to the language they shall use, and yet that each one of them shall write in his own style, and in all respects according to his own taste? May not God give such aid to his servants, that, while using their own style, they will certainly be

secured against all mistakes, and exhibit the truth with perfect propriety? It is unquestionable that Isaiah, and St. Paul, and St. John might be under the entire direction of the Holy Spirit, even as to language; and, at the same time, that each one of them might write in his own manner; and that the peculiar manner of each might be adapted to answer an important end; and that the variety of style thus introduced into the sacred volume might be suited to excite a livelier interest in the minds of men, and to secure to them a far greater amount of good than could ever have been derived from any one mode of writing.

“If we should admit that the divine superintendence and guidance afforded to the inspired writers had had no relation at all to the manner in which they exhibited either doctrines or facts, how easily might we be disturbed with doubts in regard to the propriety of some of their representations? We should most certainly consider them as liable to all the inadvertencies and mistakes to which uninspired men are commonly liable; and we should think ourselves perfectly

justified in undertaking to charge them with real errors and faults as to style, and to shew how their language might have been improved; and, in short, to treat their writings just as we treat the writings of Shakspeare and Addison. ‘Here,’ we might say, ‘Paul was unfortunate in the choice of words; and here his language does not express the ideas which he must have intended to convey.’ ‘Here the style of St. John was inadvertent; and here it was faulty; and here it would have been more agreeable to the nature of the subject, and would have more accurately expressed the truth, had it been altered thus.’ If the language of the sacred writers did not in any way come under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and if they were left, just as other writers are, to their own unaided faculties in regard to every thing which pertained to the manner of writing, then, evidently, we might use the same freedom in animadverting upon their style as upon the style of other writers. But who could treat the volume of inspiration in this manner without impiety and profaneness? And rather than make any approach to this, who would not

choose to go to an excess, if there could be an excess, in reverence for the word of God."*

To these excellent remarks I would add, that he who objects to the doctrine of *verbal* inspiration on account of the *variety of style* which obtains among the sacred writers, might, on the same principle, object to *mental* inspiration on account of the *variety of thought* by which they are equally distinguished.

It is in receiving "all Scripture as given by inspiration of God" that the mind finds repose from those endless suspicions which must assail those who regard the Bible as the word of God as to *doctrine*, but the word of man as to the *channel* of conveyance.

* Dr. Woods, on Inspiration.

CHAPTER VI.

SOME POPULAR OBJECTIONS TO THE FULL INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.*

1. It has been objected, that if the inspiration of the Scriptures be *plenary* and *verbal*, it will then follow, that the improper and wicked sayings of bad men, and even devils, which are introduced in Scripture, must lay claim to an immediate inspiration.—The answer to this very flimsy difficulty is simply this,—that though, in such cases, the Holy Spirit dictated to inspired men the very words which were uttered by the sinful agents referred to, he dictated them not as *his*, but *theirs*.

2. It has been objected, that as the inspired

* I cannot but strongly recommend to my readers a work which I have found of great use to myself on this subject, by Robert Haldane, Esq., entitled, "The Books of the Old and New Testaments proved to be canonical, and their verbal inspiration maintained and established, &c." 12mo.

writers were thoroughly acquainted with many things of which they wrote, they could not in such matters require any immediate afflatus from the Holy Spirit, and that therefore such a redundant influence would not have been vouchsafed by that infinitely wise Being who never lavishes his supernatural bestowments.—To this I reply, that the authority of a messenger must cease when he acts merely in his own name, and gives forth that only which comes within the range of his own personal knowledge, without reference to the express dictation of the power by which he is delegated. On this principle, a writer of Scripture recording that which was simply the result of his own knowledge, is a contradiction in terms; inasmuch as he must cease to be the medium of an infallible record the moment that he is thrown, in a single instance, on his own unaided resources:—that is not Holy Scripture which is not given by inspiration of God.

3. To the full view of inspiration here contended for, it has been objected, that some things are introduced by the inspired writers of too

trifling a nature to be the subject of a direct communication from God. As, for instance, when Paul says to his son Timothy—"Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities;" or as elsewhere, when the same apostle says—"The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments."* It is assumed, by objectors to the full inspiration of such texts, that they are below the standard of a divine communication, and that therefore they were the simple unaided dictates of the apostle's own mind. Could we see no design couched in them worthy of God, this would be a most irreverent way of dealing with any part of a book which gives no countenance to the idea of one part being more inspired than another. "The question is not at all whether the apostle Paul needed inspiration to enable him to give such directions, but whether it was without inspiration that these doctrines form a

* 1 Tim. v. 23. 2 Tim. iv. 13.

part of a book, *all* of which comes to us as the word of God, and inspired by him. There are many parts of Scripture that might have been written without inspiration; but the question is, were the sacred writers left without inspiration to select what they would put into this book, and what they would keep out of it? If so, then the book is theirs, not God's. Besides, if it be thought absurd to suppose that there is any inspiration in the direction which the apostle gave about his cloak and his books, it may very naturally be thought that as little inspiration was necessary to tell us how often he had received forty stripes save one; that he had fought with wild beasts at Ephesus; that he had undergone an endless variety of perils; that he had been let down over the wall of Damascus in a basket, and put into the stocks at Philippi. Of all these, and many other similar instances, it may be said, that these are cases in which, as it would be absurd to suppose any inspiration, so it was unnecessary to disavow it. We shall thus get quit of the whole account of the sufferings of the apostles. The apostle says, that

"all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable," &c. If there be many passages, or any passages, in which it would be absurd to suppose any inspiration, or which is not profitable, then he is guilty of stating what is not true."*

Besides this general defence of the full inspiration of the passages in question, they admit of a more specific support. Take the first of them—viz., Paul's counsel to Timothy respecting the use of wine. Does not the exhortation in question stand in the midst of a group of precepts, the most solemn and weighty that can be conceived of? Who, then, can prove to me, that the apostle was under inspiration in delivering *them*, if not in delivering *it*? And was it altogether unworthy of the Holy Spirit to dictate to Paul such an injunction for the use of Timothy, when the preservation of his health, and his continued labours and usefulness in the church, might depend upon it? Besides, does not the very permission to Timothy of a "little wine"

* Mr. Carew, as quoted by Mr. Haldane.

inculcate the doctrine of temperance, especially upon all the ministers of Jesus Christ ?

As to the second passage, we may fairly assume, with Grotius and Erasmus, the poverty of Paul, but not surely the absence of inspiration. "See," said Grotius, "the poverty of so great an apostle, who considered so small a matter, left at such a distance, to be a loss to him !" "Behold," said Erasmus, "the apostle's household furniture, a cloak to defend him from the rain, and a few books !" With regard to the "books or parchments," unless we knew what they were, it would be the height of presumption to affirm that the request which relates to them was uninspired.

4. I shall only notice one supposition more; viz., that the writers of Scripture sometimes intimate themselves that they are not speaking by inspiration of God. Now, before referring to the instances in question, I would here take leave to observe, that should it even appear, in certain given cases, that inspired men do disavow the immediate dictation of the Holy Spirit, all that can be fairly gathered from this

fact will be, that on all other occasions, not thus limited, they spake under his immediate guidance. In reference to certain delicacies belonging to the marriage compact, the apostle thus expresses himself in his first Epistle to the Corinthians* — “I speak this by permission, and not of command.” Now who permitted Paul to lay down the rules referred to? Why, unquestionably, the Spirit of God. What is meant, then? That Paul spake by inspiration, but that there was no express command from the Lord on the subject. As at the 10th verse of the same chapter.—“Unto the married,”† said Paul, “I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband.” The meaning is, that upon this particular Christ had issued his own mandate;‡ nevertheless Paul gave command by the Spirit of Christ. “To the rest,” said he, “speak I, not the Lord.”§ That is, the remaining counsels of the apostle were such as the great Master had left

* 1 Cor. vii. 6.

† 2 Cor. viii.

‡ Matt. v. 32.

§ 1 Cor. vii. 12.

no express injunction about, but which were nevertheless entrusted to him by the Spirit. At the 25th verse of the same chapter the apostle has the following expression: "Now, concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord; yet I give my judgment as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful." The thought is the same here as in the former instances. Though no express command had been given by Christ, on the subject treated of, yet the apostle, as one of his inspired servants, had received that grace which qualified him for a full development of the divine will, in all those things to which the personal ministry of Christ had not been directed.

In the last verse of the chapter the apostle adds—"And I think, also, that I have the mind of Christ;" an expression which some of the most eminent critics have shewn not to indicate an uncertain opinion, but full conviction and unhesitating knowledge, as in John v. 39.

But supposing all the above passages, and some others which might be quoted, to be instances in which the apostle spake without the

immediate guidance of inspiration,—a thing which I cannot admit for a moment,—it is clear that he must have acted under inspiration in apprising the church that the Spirit did not influence him in such communications ; so that nothing can be derived from the objection against the immediate and full inspiration of other parts of the word of God ; but on the contrary, it would rather go to the conclusion, that nothing short of an apostolic denial of such inspiration can justify any man in hesitating about the immediate divine authority of a single portion of the word of God.

CONCLUSION.

FROM the whole of the preceding remarks, we may infer the paramount duty of entire and unreserved submission to the authority of God in the written word. Our reason, our conscience, our affections, are all called to surrender themselves to the heavenly vision. In this inestimable volume God speaks to us upon subjects of the highest interest ; and, refusing to

listen to his voice, we seal our own unhappy doom. "Hear ye the word of the Lord," is the message addressed to all who possess the sacred boon; and he who by prejudice or sin excludes himself from the benefits of this message, which reveals the only method of salvation, is chargeable with a degree of rashness and folly which eternity itself will but fully disclose. Let the prayer of each one who reads this little treatise be—"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wonderful things contained in thy law!"

THE END.











